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July 1, 1884.

Vol. XIV.

Single Number.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 362.

DEADWOOD DICK'S CLAIM; or, The Fairy Face of Faro Flats.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, "DENVER DOLL" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.



DEADWOOD DICK LOOKED HIS UTTER ASTONISHMENT, AS HE SAW THE LOVELY APPARITION OF THE BAG.

mfrd

Deadwood Dick's Claim;

OR,
The Fairy Face of Faro Flats.

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CHAPTER I.

THE WHITE OWL'S STORY.

"GET up, Lightfoot. Make a little better time, for the indications are that we shall get a soaking ere long and this narrow gulch ain't the most desirable place to get caught in, you can bet. A good stiff shower would send a torrent rushing down here that we would not be able to stem. Then, too, I'm none too familiar with this region to be able to guarantee for our personal safety."

The speaker was a horseman who was threading a deep and narrow boulderous mountain gulch, one dark May night, when the sullen character of the dome overhead predicted that a heavy rain was close at hand.

Great jagged mountain walls of rock towered up on either side and the scenery was of the most wild and rugged type.

The horseman who had ventured into these isolated surroundings, was a man evidently acclimated to the wild regions of the Far West, for he paid little attention to anything except the dark mass of clouds overhead, leaving it to his trained horse to select his own footing.

His age appeared to be less than forty years; he possessed a wiry, muscular figure of medium stature, and his garments were of a somber color, from his top-boots to his sombrero, and a cloak worn about his shoulders.

His face was one that would be apt to attract notice in any crowd. There was something about it that was genial and severe—something frank and good-natured—something reflecting a fearless and dare-devil nature.

His hair was worn long over his shoulders, his face was cleanly shaven, and his eyes dark, keen and penetrating.

He was well armed, and his saddle-trappings were of an elaborate style of finish, while the horse he bestrode was a handsome, coal black steed of fiery spirit, and yet evidently thoroughly trained to obey the slightest word of his master.

The night was a sultry one despite the fact that a stiff breeze sucked through the gulch and laden upon it was a strong, peculiar perfume of mountain flowers.

The evening was not far advanced, but the sullen mass of clouds made the night unusually dark, and when the rain came down it threatened to come down in torrents.

The lone *voyageur* full well understood this, and he urged on his faithful animal with what speed was possible, considering the rugged nature of the bottom where great boulders made frequent obstructions.

"This is a new trail to me!" he observed, as he rode along, "and leads to a part of this country that it has never been my fortune to explore. But what matters it?—I am as much at home here as anywhere, I am sure."

There was a trifle of bitterness expressed in his tone, and his eyes flashed with a gleam, that was revengeful.

For half an hour, he urged Lightfoot on, eagerly; then, as the thunder rolled ominously, up among the mountain peaks, and big drops of rain began to patter down, he drew rein.

It was not because of the pattering of the big drops, nor because of the crashing of Heaven's artillery, but owing to a peculiar approaching sound, which caused Lightfoot to snort in alarm.

The sound was like the roar of a sea, rushing through the gulch.

It was not a new sound, to the ears of the lone traveler—he had heard it, oftentimes, before, and knew only too well its terrible significance.

It was one of the terrific mountain torrents that burst down the various fissure thoroughfares of nature, at a moment's warning, and sweep away everything of a portable character, leaving desolation and destruction in its track.

The horseman heard the roar and knew that he had but a few moments in which to get out of the jaws of death.

And even as his ears caught the sound of the torrent's approach, another sound broke upon his hearing—a human cry of terror and anguish, commingled.

It sounded not ten feet ahead!

Was he not, then, alone, in this terrible death's causeway?

He instinctively arose in his stirrups, and peered ahead of him.

As if to aid him, in penetrating the gloom, there was a vivid glare of lightning.

What he saw surprised as well as horrified him.

Not three yards ahead of him, an Indian was helplessly bound to a tree, a prey for the oncoming torrent!

The white man's mind appeared made up in an instant, for, pressing the spurs into the side of Lightfoot, he dashed forward. A knife flashed, as he reached the tree, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the horse with its freight of two human beings, was dashing up the mountain side.

Up!—on! on! The faithful animal climbed, as sure of foot as the frisky mountain sheep, determined to get beyond the reach of the death torrent, whose roar was now deafening.

On—on; then, exhausted by extraordinary exertion, poor Lightfoot stumbled and fell, just upon reaching a ledge, fifty feet above the gulch bottom.

"Safe! thank Heaven!" The white traveler said, as, with a rush and a roar that made the earth tremble, the deluge of water swept down through the gulch.

The very air was filled with a dense mist; the frantic waters lashed the edge of the bench whereon the escaped trio had gained a footing, not an instant too soon.

It was a sight and a scene of a lifetime, but only of a few minutes' duration, when the torrent was gone, and the waters had subsided, as suddenly as they came.

As the horse sank down upon the ledge, the Indian and his rescuer scrambled off, and stood in awed silence until the flood had swept by; then the red-skin touched the other's arm.

"What is my pale-face brother's name?" he asked. "Him great brave, and Me-no-toga, the White Owl owe um life to pale-face."

The stranger turned and regarded the savage oddly.

"So you're the White Owl, eh?" he demanded. "I've heard of you. I am Deadwood Dick. Likely you never heard of me?"

"Me-no-toga heard of Deadwood Dick. Him great chief of road-agents."

"Well, yas—that is, I used ter was, but I ain't no more."

"Where pale-face brave hear of White Owl?"

"Oh! I've heard you mentioned by different ones. They say you're the richest red-skin up in this region."

The White Owl shrugged his shoulders.

"Me-no-toga no longer rich. Hab heap great trouble. Pale-faces steal um claim, um money, um daughter."

"Indeed! You're the one wot's got the pretty Injun gal, known as the Fairy Face?"

"Fairy Face, Me-no-toga's daughter. But um hab her no more. Pale-face dogs steal her away from White Owl, and be no find her. Pale-face dogs tie White Owl to tree to starve."

"Indeed! Let's hear about this!" Deadwood Dick cried, eagerly. "I thought you were a peaceful red-skin, who, through General Sheridan, secured a tract of land up this country somewhere."

"Me-no-toga buy land of Gober'ment, same as pale-face, and pay money for um. Me-no-toga build um house an' store, um him twenty braves lib with um. Me-no-toga farm, an' hunt, an' find gold, on um claim. Den big heap miners come long an' want b'y land. Me-no-toga refuse to sell; den pale-face kill Me-no-toga's braves, steal Fairy Face, an' take Me-no-toga prisoner. Him escape, but no find Fairy Face. Git recaptured by bad pale-faces. Say dey gib up Fairy Face when Me-no-toga tell where 'im gold hid. Me no-toga refuse, den bad men leah him five days tied to tree to starve. T'ink him tell rudder'n starve. Don' know Me-no-toga! Um great brave. He no fear to die. Ugh! look!"

The old warrior stepped a pace closer, and, holding down his head, indicated a place on top of it where a patch of scalp had been torn off—and that, too, quite recently, for the wound was not yet healed over, and must naturally cause the red-skin intense suffering.

"Bid pale-faces do that!" he said, grimly. "Dey t'ink make Me-no-toga tell where um gold is; but he no dog—he great brave, an' lib for vengeance."

"Well, I should laugh if you wouldn't, old man!" Deadwood Dick said, heartily, putting out his hand. "Now, I'll give you a straight

tip, that I don't, as a rule, take no stock in Injuns; but I admire your grit, dashed if I don't, and knowin' from report, that you're a square old chap, if I can be of any help to you, in straigtenin' out the kinks of your case, why just call on me. I don't believe in one parcel o' men bulldozin' a weaker party out o' rights, no matter if it's Injun, Chinee, or Greaser, an' I generally make it a point to clinch paws w' the weak side, an' help it out o' defickelty. So if you want any help count Deadwood Dick in solid with you!"

The Indian listened with eager attention, and appeared greatly pleased that the ex-road prince should tender his services.

"Pale-face Dick great chief!" he said, "an' Me-no-toga proud to shake um hand. Me-no-toga good Injun, 'cept when wronged, an' he like friendship of Dick. Dick help um find Le-to-wa-go, the Fairy Face, an' Me-no-toga gib 'im much gold an' thanks. Me-no-toga hab no one but Le-to-wa-go, now, an' um berry sad. Ugh! come! Me-no-toga show um pale-face brudder to um dry place 'til sun arise. Den um see Faro Flats—de town where Me-no-toga lib fore pale-face dogs come."

"Which way?"

"Ober mountain. Horse follow?"

"Leave him here until he's rested. He is clean tired out. When he gets rested, you bet high he'll smell me out, like a dog!"

"Den come!"

And without another word the old red-skin started rapidly off up the mountain-side, showing that he was still spry and inured to hardships, despite his age.

Securing his rifle, Deadwood Dick followed.

He had often heard of White Owl, the Friendly Crow, as a red-skin who could be implicitly trusted, and who was an Indian of good heart and unusual intellect. He had long been recognized as a stalwart ally of the pale-faces, and it was owing to this fact, that General Sheridan and several other army officers, had secured for him and his handful of followers a parcel of land outside the reservation, set apart for the Crow nation, in a pleasant mountain-locked valley where civilization was not apt to soon intrude.

But it appeared that that ever-roaming class of nomads, the mining element, had invaded the White Owl's little paradise, and usurped his rights, with the same ruthless disregard, as was exercised, and in one sense sanctioned by the Government, in the case of the Black Hills excitement.

Dick, too, had often heard old mountain rovers speak of the great beauty and personal accomplishments of Le-to-wa-go, the Fairy Face, and had often desired to see her.

Some miners declared it their belief that she was not the daughter of Me-no-toga, while others declared that she was the result of the chief's union with a white woman, who had once been captured and adopted by the Crow race.

It was generally believed that Me-no-toga was worth an immense fortune in gold, partly acquired from his claim, and partly from inheritance from old Job Simpson, a Rocky Mountain trapper and prospector, who was known to be the owner of several *cached* fortunes at the time of his death, and who, presumably, had left them to the White Owl, as Simpson had no relatives, and he and White Owl had been as brothers to one another for years.

Therefore, as Me-no-toga's Fairy Face would in all probability become the inheritor of his wealth at his death, she was a "catch" for which more than one fortune-hunter made it a point to angle.

Not that Dick had any such selfish design in view when he offered his services to Me-no-toga; but he had a desire to see the strange beauty for other reasons.

As for himself, he was not positive that he was free to pay his addresses to any woman, as it had been months since he had seen Calamity Jane, and in that time a report had reached him that she had been killed in a fracas up in an Idaho town.

As the report lacked reliable confirmation, it of course remained a matter of doubt to him whether he was, or was not, divorced by death.

It could hardly matter, however, as there was little doubt but what, after all their strange adventures and vicissitudes, they would never be reunited again.

Up the beetling mountain-side Me-no-toga rapidly picked his way, while Dick found it necessary for him to exert himself in order to keep the old red-skin in sight.

The rain poured steadily down now, and the lightning flashed more vividly.

An hour of laborious climbing brought them to a split, or gap, in the range, which they entered and followed for over a mile, when they suddenly debouched upon a promontory overlooking a valley far below them, at the bottom of which appeared a score or more of twinkling, star-like lights.

Here Me-no-toga paused and pointed downward with one long bony finger, while his visage grew stern and impassioned.

"There lies Osceola, the home of Me-no-toga. All that land, so far as eye can reach, along valley, am his. A month ago, Crows dwelt there, quiet an' peaceful, an' their lodges numbered ten. Now, there many pale-face shanties, an' Crows dwell there no more. All Crows dead 'cep' Me-no-toga an' Fairy Face. She down there, a prisoner. Me-no-toga's home gone, but not um spirit. De blood of his brudders cries for vengeance. De scalp of de White Owl hangs at de pale-face's belt. Dat cry for vengeance. Ugh! come!"

He turned abruptly, and led the way rapidly along the ridge, until they came to a dense chaparral of mesquite bushes of unusually tall growth.

Into this thicket the Indian penetrated, until they came in under a great overhanging ledge, where a score of men could easily keep dry.

Here were a few cooking "tools," also a supply of meat, fuel, mining implements and weapons.

The chief soon had a cheery fire burning, and a piece of bear haunch spitted for roasting, as well as a pot of coffee boiling; and, when it was ready, he and Dick partook of the repast with such heartiness as comes only to the sturdy mountain rover.

When it was finished, Me-no-toga left the thicket, but soon returned.

"Night dark an' gloomy, an' rain, he slack up. We go down dar," and he indicated the direction of his old home.

"All right!" Dick responded. "We will go, now. A better time cannot be selected!"

CHAPTER II.

PHILANDER PILGRIM HAS CALLERS.

FARO FLATS was a typical mining-town of the "placer" formation.

The stampede which had robbed Me-no-toga of his possessions was made up of the same heterogeneous element characteristic of every other mining-town of the "boom" order in the Far West.

The stampede had come one day, and the next, literally, the "city" of Faro Flats was under way.

The sandy soil of the valley bottom was rich with golden flakes, and the greatest excitement prevailed.

Habitations of all sorts sprung into existence with wonderful rapidity, and within a few weeks from the time of the first invading party, the camp could boast of two-score or more of buildings, not to mention tents, and had a population of several hundred souls, with many more daily arriving.

Among the business places of the young city was a bank, a general supply store, two saloons, a theater, post-office, and "Noah's Ark," the only hotel, which was also a saloon, gaming room, and general resort for those who had money.

The yield from the sluices being rich, money was, of course, plenty, and a place like Colonel Noah Norton's "Ark," was sure to catch the floating funds of the camp.

The colonel was practically, one of the important personages of the town, from the fact that he owned a number of claims, besides the Ark, and had, by universal vote, been chosen "Mayor" of the camp, from the moment of its existence.

Another prominent person was Mr. Judson Cameron, who was supposed to be very wealthy, and who had opened the bank. He, too, owned much of the confiscated property, and though a shrewd-appearing business man, was a confirmed gambler, as well as a rash speculator in Eastern stocks.

He lived in the best style of any one in the town, and was considered a sort of nabob.

He had been among the original throng of invaders, but his family had not followed him, until later.

And in regard to the beautiful daughter of old Me-no-toga, it was generally known that she was held a close prisoner by certain ones in the town, but no one had ever been known to own up to knowing anything about her; consequently, it remained a matter of mystery as to who were really her custodians.

This very fact created a spirit of rivalry, if

not ill-feeling, among all classes, for the possession of the chief's daughter was considered a most desirable acquisition, as she must eventually turn out a prize.

But, if she were a prisoner in Faro Flats, no one betrayed any knowledge of her whereabouts, while, at the same time, whoever did have her, was jealously guarding the secret, and those who didn't have her were quietly and constantly trying to find her.

Among other business enterprises of Faro Flats was one of a very recent arrival—a Mr. Philander Pilgrim, M. D., Counsellor-at-Law, and Editor of the Faro Flats *Free Lance*.

Now, it so happened that Mr. Pilgrim filled a much-needed want, for there was seldom a day but what some festive galoot found himself in need of the M. D.'s surgical skill; there was also plenty of legal business to attend to, owing to the sales and transfers of claims and squatters' sites; and, as for the *Free Lance*, there was plenty of news to publish, and a good sale for the little sheet.

Therefore, Mr. Pilgrim's advent was regarded with favor by the citizens of the Flats, while at the same time, the aforesaid Pilgrim, who looked very hungry and dilapidated, on his arrival at the Flats, had not been there a half-week before he could safely congratulate himself on having "struck a soft snap."

Mr. Pilgrim was a lank individual of some thirty years, who looked sallow, hollow-cheeked, and altogether as though he might have been reared upon a skim-milk diet. His hair, too, was fiery red, his nose sharp and Irving-like, and his legs very, very long and thin.

Being a six footer, when Mr. Pilgrim walked, he seemed as if in great danger of collapsing, or of breaking apart, joint from joint; but the shekels of Faro Flats flowed into his coffers with generous regularity, and Mr. Pilgrim was happy.

On the night of the storm, when Deadwood Dick had encountered Me-no-toga, Pilgrim sat in his sanctum, alone, and busy preparing "copy" for his paper, and wondering whether any local "pilgrim" would require medical attendance that night, when a rap sounded upon the door, which was located directly over the post-office.

"Come in!" called out Pilgrim, involuntarily reaching into his drawer and taking out a case of surgical instruments, more than half-expecting to see some person enter who had been "salivated."

He did not, however, have any such pleasure. The door opened, and two persons entered, at the sight of whom Mr. Pilgrim felt slightly uncomfortable.

One of the visitors was Deadwood Dick, who wore a half-mask over the upper portion of his face.

The other was old Me-no-toga, who looked stern enough to shatter the nerves of a braver man than Philander Pilgrim.

"Good evening, sir!" Dick saluted, advancing toward the editorial table. "I suppose you're the man who runs the newspaper?"

"I am, sir."

"And you make a specialty of publishing news of interest to your patrons?"

"I do, sir, providing it is not of an advertising character."

"Well, I dare say you have heard of the former Indian owner of the land upon which this camp now stands—Me-no-toga, the White Owl?"

"I have."

"How do you stand on the question of the usurpation of the Indian's right to this whole valley?"

"My paper is neutral, sir, and yet I cannot publish or express any sentiments contrary to the opinion of the public that patronize me!"

"Indeed! I suppose you think the red-skin has no rights, then?"

"Not so far as the *Free Lance* is concerned, sir."

"Then you refuse to publish a manifesto in his favor?"

"Most assuredly I do!"

"Then, sir, you had better pack your valise while there is a lull in business, and prepare to packachee as soon as morning's blush kisses the eastern horizon!"

"I do not understand you, sir!"

"Then, I will make it plainer, so that the dullest intellect must surely comprehend!" Dick declared. "This red skin is Me-no-toga. By virtue of deeds of purchase and sale, and being a naturalized citizen of this country, he is the owner of one hundred and sixty acres of land in this valley, upon which tract is located this camp of Faro Flats, seized upon and illegally taken possession of, and built over in part, by

the present inhabitants, who are trespassers, and liable to arrest and fine so long as they remain illegal tenants. It is Me-no-toga's purpose to sell and deed to such honorable men, as may wish to purchase, tracts of this land. Those who refuse to purchase remain trespassers, and I have been appointed by Me-no-toga to collect periodical revenues from such, at the point of the pistol, if needs be. In consideration that you are not a ground tenant, we propose to leave you unmolested, provided that, from time to time, you shall give us the use of the columns of your paper for our manifestoes!"

"And in case I refuse?" Pilgrim demanded, nervously.

"If you refuse you will be given verbal notice now, once and for good, that you have five hours in which to get up and out of Faro Flats. If you do not thus go, the *Free Lance* will have an opening for a new editor, before another sunset!"

"Ha! A man is liable to arrest, sir, for uttering a threat!"

"Good Blackstone, undoubtedly, but it don't answer here. If you have ever heard of me you will know that I am the man who has found it right, necessary and convenient to defy arrest. I do not say this in a spirit of braggadocio, but to apprise you that I fear no man who walks on two legs, here below. Me-no-toga, I believe, fills a similar bill. To make a long story short, if you do not publish our manifesto, or get out of this town before tomorrow sun-blush, Me-no-toga will guarantee there will never be another issue of the Faro Flats *Free Lance*, under your management. Me-no-toga strikes but once at a man, and then it will be for vengeance and to the death! So decide quickly!"

The speech had the effect of capping the climax of Philander Pilgrim's alarm, and he looked ready to faint.

"Give me your copy and it shall be published!" he said, with a shiver. "If it brings me trouble you will be to blame."

"Of course. We'll shoulder all the blame," Dick assured, dryly, as he tossed a roll of paper to the desk. "If that appears to-morrow, all right and well; if not, there will be one journalistic enterprise for sale, in the camp of Faro Flats, as sure as I am Deadwood Dick. Come, White Owl—we will go!"

CHAPTER III.

BIG POKER!

WHEN the Faro Flats' *Free Lance* appeared upon the street, the next morning, its front page contained the following manifesto, with the head-lines in the largest type that Philander Pilgrim's place afforded:

"IMPORTANT!"

"A Warning to Trespassers, and to All Whom it May Concern:—

"Be it known to all people and their heirs and assigns, that, by virtue of legal deed, all that tract of land, embracing one hundred and sixty acres in the Osceola valley bottom, extending east from Deer Gap, to the bank of Spider creek, and including the site of the present mining-town of Faro Flats, does belong, lawfully, to one Me-no-toga, the White Owl, a Crow Indian, and citizen of the United States.

"And, be it further known, that Me-no-toga was unlawfully dispossessed of his lands, and his brothers were foully murdered by the present inhabitants of Faro Flats, and that Me-no-toga's spirit is revengeful. His home has been broken up by the pale faces, his beautiful daughter held a prisoner by them, and he must have redress.

"Therefore, he is prepared to sell his lands, in 'claim' lots, to such of the honorable men who dwell in Faro Flats, at reasonable prices, in accordance with their value, and those making purchases will be given good titles. All refusing to buy the lands they now occupy and work, are trespassers. Accordingly, Me-no-toga has appointed as his agent, one Mr. Deadwood Dick, whose business it will be to collect a periodical rent, revenue or interest money, from every person who is not a landholder, by virtue of purchase, from the White Owl. This revenue will be collected whenever deemed just and judicious, and will be payable to the collector on demand. If not paid on demand, Me-no-toga promises that those who thus refuse to give him his rights, shall fall within the scope of his vengeance. Negotiations for purchase of claims from Me-no-toga, the White Owl, can be made through the advertising columns of the Faro Flats *Free Lance*, and will be attended to, promptly. Peaceable possession is guaranteed to those who desire to deal honorably with the White Owl; death and destruction to those who will not. Me-no-toga will strike an enemy but once, but that one blow will be effective, and known by the sign of the Scarlet Cross. Let all, therefore, take warning, and be prepared!"

"A reward of one thousand dollars will be paid to

Deadwood Dick's Claim.

the person returning to Me-no-toga his lost or stolen daughter, Fairy Face, now held a prisoner by the people of Faro Flats.

"(Signed.) ME-NO-TOGA, THE WHITE OWL.
DEADWOOD DICK.
Agent and Collector of Revenue."

Did this proclamation produce an immense sensation? Could it do less?

The populace of Faro Flats, in the excitement of the struggle for gold, had not paused to consider that Me-no-toga had any right to the valuable placers of the valley bottom. He was but a red-skin, anyhow, and was not expected to stand up for equal rights with the white man; but the appearance of this *manifesto* in the *Free Lance*, and the fact that the noted name of Deadwood Dick was coupled with it, was sufficient to set the excitable pulse of Faro Flats wildly bounding.

In the serenity of the camp's existence, the warning of the Indian came like a thundercloud upon a clear summer's sky. Miners gathered upon the street in knots, and at Noah's Ark, to discuss the probable future; there were those who had followed gold-mining for a decade, and who had reason to believe that there were dark days in store, for Faro Flats.

There were, also, men who knew Deadwood Dick, of old, and who had no reason to doubt, judging by his former exploits, but what he was entirely capable of collecting the revenues for Me-no-toga, while many of the original party of invaders, who had had a hand in the slaughter of the Crows, felt that there was good reason to believe that the old chief would fulfill his vengeful threat.

Colonel Noah Norton, the proprietor of the Ark, being one of the most prominent citizens, was waited upon by a delegation of miners, who put the question of what was to be done?

"Done!" the colonel echoed. "Why, nothin', to be sure. Ye durned idiots, ye do 't s'pose a lone white galoot and an Injun can skeer a hull town, do ye? Jest let 'em show up, around here, an' I'll shoot their heads off!"

"But, cunnel, et ain't safe fur a man ter hev any money about him!" one miner declared. "Yer see, I know this hyer Deadwood Dick, of old, an' he ain't afeerd o' nothin', an' when he sez 'pony up,' either yer's got ter pony, or drop!"

"Bah! stuff! nonsense!" the colonel snorted, in supreme disgust. "Jest give it out, around town, that I'll give a thousand apiece fer the heads o' these two chaps, an' you'll never be troubled by 'em!"

Perhaps the colonel really believed this; if so, it was merely a delusion, on his part, for though the reward placards were liberally posted, about the camp, they seemed to have no terror for the Revenue Collector.

Business was a little dull that afternoon about the Ark, and the colonel was lying upon the bed in his room, over the saloon, trying to get a quiet snooze, when he suddenly became aware that he was not alone.

This fact first became apparent to him when he felt a metallic touch in the region of his temple. This touch had the unpleasant suggestiveness of being a pistol muzzle, and the colonel's eyes popped open, in alarm.

An expression more forcible than polite escaped his lips, as he beheld a black-clad, black-masked individual, standing by the bedside, with a pair of "sixes" in either grasp, ready for use.

"Howdy!" the visitor smiled. "I trust I find you well, Colonel Norton?"

"Cuss ye! Who aire ye?" the colonel demanded, sitting bolt upright on his bed.

"I am Deadwood Dick, at yer service!" was the calm reply, "and have called to collect a little revenue of you, in behalf of my client, Me-no-toga, the White Owl. Presuming you would be glad to see me, since you have been to the trouble of giving me some free advertising, called upon you, first."

The colonel was a large, portly man, who would have nearly made two of the cool Revenue Collector; still, he looked rather dubious and uneasy, as he noted that both of Dick's revolvers were full-cocked, and that he had the drop!

"Git out o' here!" he growled, assuming all the ferocity of appearance in his power. "Ef ye take me fer a fool, ye'r bound ter git left, sir!"

"Oh! no—not necessarily!" Dick assured, with imperturbable composure. "I take you to be a man of superior sense, who is willing to do what is fair, at all times."

"Ye'll find out ye can't bull-doze me!" Norton

roared. "I'll give ye a jiffy to git out of this room, blast ye!"

"And, I'll give you half of a jiffy to hand me over your pocket-book. If you refuse, I retire, with good grace, but there will be crape on the doorbell of the Ark, before sunset. You know Me-no-toga will strike, and the cheapest way for you is to shell out. Will you do it, or shall I bore a hole through your ear, as a signal to the red-skin, that you belong to him, to do with as he pleases?"

"Ye dasn't shoot!"

"Ha! ha! I reckon you don't know me!"

The colonel uttered a snarl, and drew a plethoric pocket-book from an inner pocket.

"Take it, ye infernal hound!" he gritted, "but don't fergit that I'll make ye pay dearly for this job!"

"All right. You should be glad to get off, so easily. Hurry up and accumulate some more, as I shall call on you again, by-and-by. Should you desire to purchase the property you trespass on, we will refund all future revenues collected of you. *Au revoir, colonel!* Go to sleep now!"

And covering his retreat, Deadwood Dick left the room, taking care to lock the door after him.

So that, by the time Norton could raise an alarm, the daring Revenue Collector was safely away!

The news spread like wild-fire that the colonel had been relieved of something like five hundred dollars by Deadwood Dick, and the report threw Faro Flats into a greater state of excitement than before.

The colonel, now thoroughly aroused, doubled his own reward offered for the capture of either Me-no-toga, or his daring agent, and small parties of men, who would not work at mining, scoured the surrounding country in hopes of adding to their finances by winning the reward.

But with a great range of mountains at either hand, with wild labyrinthian defiles, cavernous recesses, and jungle-like forests, it was literally like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Such a man as Deadwood Dick had for years proven himself to be, was not likely to find it a hard matter to evade these human bloodhounds, who would take his life for a paltry sum of gold.

The miners of Faro Flats, who had hitherto looked upon the local bank as an unnecessary institution, now hastened to deposit their respective "piles" within the keeping of the iron safe, not knowing what minute they might be called upon to "pony up" to the dare-devil Revenue Collector.

Every new-comer to the Flats was regarded with suspicion; and every man seemed to regard his next neighbor as worthy of watching.

And while this unsettled and excitable state of affairs prevailed, there was one man who seemed to take matters more complacently than the others.

This was Mr. Judson Cameron, the banker.

He smiled indifferently at the consternation of the populace, and spent his spare moments at the gaming table, just the same as though such persons as Deadwood Dick and Me-no-toga did not exist.

Mr. Cameron was a bland-appearing, and rather handsome man, of four or five-and-forty years. He was one who had evidently been accorded the advantages of thorough education in early life, and who had never known what it was to want, pecuniarily.

His manners were easy and rather pleasant, but his eyes were restless and roving, as if he either was watching for an opportunity to get the best of somebody, or else expected a stab in the back from a lurking foe.

He dressed faultlessly, wore a full, glossy brown beard, and was, as a whole, an individual who would attract the fairer sex.

His family consisted of two daughters and a young man, who was announced as a distant relative.

Chrissie Cameron, the elder daughter, was nineteen, a decided brunette, of fine physique, and great facial beauty—a queenly sort of girl, who would reign as a belle in any good social sphere.

She dressed well, and was not a little proud of being Miss Chrissie Cameron.

At least this was the impression she created among the rough critics of Faro Flats.

Coral—Charming Coral, the miners called her—was altogether a different type of character from her sister.

She was seventeen, petite of figure, sunny-haired and happy-faced, with sparkling brown eyes and a laugh that was merry music in itself.

Where Chrissie was languid and somewhat sluggish of temperament, Coral was gay and buoyant-spirited; where Chrissie preferred to be indoors with her books and music, Coral was eminently an out-of-door girl; with her mustang, rifle and "kit" of painting materials, she was wont to pass many pleasant hours in the picturesque country surrounding Faro Flats.

The distant relative alluded to, was a sort of third cousin to Judson Cameron, named Haliburton Hartley, and acted as cashier for the banker as well as book keeper and, in fact, general manager of the bank; for Mr. Cameron spent more hours at the card-table than at the bank.

Hartley was a wide-awake young fellow, just out of his teens, and the banker was well aware that he could scarcely find a person who would serve him better than Hal Hartley. Consequently Hartley was the favorite of the family.

The evening of the same day that bad witnessed Deadwood Dick's first "revenue" collection, saw Mr. Cameron seated at a card-table in the colonel's "Ark".

There were in his company several other gentlemen, but only four of the party, including the banker were playing.

Mr. Cameron apparently had been in good luck, for he had a large stack of ivory checks, representing a considerable sum of money, in front of him, while the "pile" of each other player looked rather reduced.

The game was poker.

The use of checks, in place of using money on the board had been inaugurated by Colonel Norton, a keeper being in charge, the same as at the faro-table who received money for checks and cashed them when the play was done.

This arrangement had been made owing to the "grab, shoot an' git" game in practice among a certain class of ruffians of the mines which contributed largely to the mortality list.

No game was allowed in the colonel's resort for money, where checks were not in use to represent the value of all bets, a precaution that prevented much wrangling and perhaps bloodshed.

The gentlemen who were playing with the banker evidently felt their losses keenly, judging by their respective expressions of countenance, and were about ready to call quits.

Mr. Cameron's bland face, however, indicated that he was immensely pleased with the financial prospect.

"Well, we will try one more whirl!" Mr. Peterson said, who owned one of the best paying claims in the camp. "A man with a bank at his command, however, seems to have better luck than any one else."

"Banks sometimes fail, however," Mr. Boyle, another player, said, a trifle of bitterness in his tone.

"If you mean that as an insinuation!" Cameron spoke up, with flushing cheeks, "allow me to inform you that I have not overdrawn my bank account yet. I could play you at your choice of stakes until you were tired, or any oth—"

"Did you say any other man, sir?"

It was not Boyle who uttered this inquiry—only Boyle and Cameron were glaring at each other in a way men would not be apt to do who were not very angry.

The speaker had stepped to the table from among the group of bystanders.

A glance was sufficient to discover that he was not a common personage.

His build was but medium, but he was clean-limbed, and no doubt quick and muscular. His face was rather a boldly attractive one, with clear-cut features. The eyes were dark and piercing; the hair, worn long down over his shoulders, was of a golden hue, and wavy, glossy and luxuriant. His mustache was of the same color, and faultlessly trained.

His attire was of "buckskin" cloth—pants and jacket—with the addition of a white flannel embroidered shirt, with collar thrown back, patent-leather top boots, and a jauntily-slouched prairie hat upon his head.

His garments were liberally trimmed with buttons, and each button had been manufactured from a twenty-dollar gold coin, giving a somewhat novel and striking effect.

His belt contained a silver-plated revolver, and upon his left little finger gleamed a magnificent diamond ring of untold value.

Such was the individual who had propounded the question—

"Did you say any other man, sir?"

Judson Cameron heard the words and removed his angry gaze from Boyle's face, only to transfer it to the face of this sportive-appearing stranger.

"I mean it, if I didn't finish the sentence, sir?" Cameron replied, unhesitatingly.

It was evident that the insinuation of Boyle in particular had cut him and he was not a person who would back down until his all was gone. He had a temper which once aroused could not be subdued easily.

"Well, if you mean it!" the man of the gold buttons remarked, "I would not mind trying you a whack when the other gents get done, if you desire to play any more. I must apprise you, however, before we begin that I best like to play with a man who will never give up until he is broke or breaks me. I will also tell you that I play an honest game, play always to win, and, nine times out of ten, am successful. Therefore, if you like the prospectus, we'll amuse each other!"

Mr. Cameron eyed the sport keenly while he was speaking, something of the usual blandness returning to his face.

"Very well, sir. Your assurance may not always stick by you. Not presuming to ask your name, can you inform me in regard to what you are called?"

"I can. Sometimes I am dubbed Gold-Button Bill—at others, The Professional. Either handle will not offend my innate modesty."

And so saying, the sport seated himself upon one of the chairs just vacated by one of the other players.

A considerable crowd had now gathered about the table, for it was apparent that there was fun in store for the lookers-on, and probably for one of the players.

As he seated himself, Gold-Button Bill laid a cocked six-shooter on the table, at his right.

"I don't suppose that is necessary," he remarked, "but I have noticed that it sometimes has a counteracting effect against cheating."

"I will see that you don't cheat," Cameron replied calmly. "Do you have any choice as to amount of stakes?"

"No; suit yourself. You know your pile?"

"Do you know yours?"

"Presumably."

"Very well. I have five thousand dollars at hand, checks and all. If you win that, I'll write you out a check."

"What is it—draw, with five a side, subject to raise?"

"Yes."

Gold-Button Bill took a large wad of bills from his pocket, and counted out five upon the table. Each one bore the denomination of one thousand dollars.

His money and that of Mr. Cameron was then exchanged for checks, and staked; a fresh pack of cards was produced, and the game began.

Silence reigned about the table. A score of necks were craned forward, and a score of spectators watched with bated breath.

"I see a good hand here," Gold-Button Bill said, after awhile.

"Oh, you do, eh?" Mr. Cameron chuckled. "How great is your confidence?"

"Five thousand dollars' worth."

A peculiar, inexplicable expression flashed for an instant across the banker's face. Whether it was a sign of hesitation or not they did not know, who noticed it.

"Five thousand, eh?" he repeated; "well—but, sir, is my check satisfactory?"

"It is not. I notice that ivories talk strongest here. Perhaps, on the strength of your being the local banker, you can borrow of the house!"

Mr. Cameron's chagrin at being refused was evident, for he bit his lip with vexation.

Just then Colonel Norton stepped up.

"Why, what is this?" he ejaculated. "Do you want money, Cameron?"

"Yes!" the banker replied, with a savageness he seldom manifested at the gaming-table. "Lend me what you have, 'till I win this game—or, at furthest, until I can get to my private safe!"

"Or to the depositors' safe!" sneered Alf Boyle, in an undertone; but, low as it was, it reached the acute hearing of the banker, who wheeled around, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

"I'll call you to account for that insult, sir!" he cried, passionately, "if you will have the kindness to remain here until this game is over."

"Very well!" Boyle answered, promptly; "you will always find me around when you want me."

"Here are five thousand, Cameron!" the

colonel said, tossing the banker a roll of bills instead of the usual ivories. "Wait; I can raise you five times that amount directly."

A glimpse had the colonel slyly got of the banker's hand, and he was off in a jiffy.

During his absence, Gold-Button Bill, who appeared to be a very composed young man, took time to give Mr. Alfred Boyle a searching scrutiny, while at the same time he bought a number of thousand dollars' worth of checks—far exceeding five—as if in anticipation of some lively bidding on the game.

He showed no nervousness whatever, at the prospect of winning or losing so large a sum, and appeared to be very flush with greenbacks, of large denominations—so flush, in fact, that the ferret-eyed individual who sold checks for the table, took the bills he had received from the drawer, and gave them a cursory inspection.

"Oh! they're A1!" Gold-Button Bill declared, observing the action. "I am not a shover of the queer. Professionals generally prefer good stuff. It is more reliable to meet all emergencies."

By this time the colonel was back, and laid a plentious wad of bills upon the table.

Cameron ran rapidly over the amount, and nodded his satisfaction.

"Can you meet it?" Norton demanded, not a little anxiously.

"Yes. Here!" and taking a check-book from his pocket, the banker wrote out a check for—one hundred thousand dollars!

"Keep that; and get me more money, if necessary!" he ordered. "Now, sir, I will see you ten thousand on my hand, above the original bet!"

"I certainly admire your grit," was Gold-Button Bill's response. "Here, checkman—checks for this entire amount of money, and mum as to the size, since this seems to be a sort of game of blind-man's buff," and taking his hat from his head, the Professional handed it to the checkman, who first counted the money, and then nearly filled the bat with checks of various denominations—and it was no small head the Professional had, at that.

"The same to me!" Cameron commanded. And it was done.

Ten checks for Cameron, and five for the Professional, each representing one thousand dollars, were then placed on the board in addition to the original five each.

"Now, then," Gold-Button Bill said, "I will see you at ten, and go you five better."

And fifteen checks went down alongside his wager.

The excitement about the table grew each moment stronger. It was certain that some one was playing a stiff bluff, but who? If Cameron, there were two hundred men in the room who felt that they had reason to be anxious. If the Gold Button, he certainly preserved a marvelously calm exterior.

Had the doubtful ones consulted Col. Noah Norton's face for consolation, they would have found but little of it to satisfy them.

"Go you five!" Cameron gritted.

"Ditto!" the Professional raised.

"This is monstrous!" Cameron said. "Norton, do I see any favors?"

"No!" the colonel declared. "This thing has gone too far, already. Go only to the length—then stand!"

"Very well. It is make or break. I raise the pot thirty thousand better—my last."

"Very good. I could go you twenty, but ten will do. The ace, king, queen, right, left and ten-spot win!" and as Mr. Cameron arose from the table, with a deathly pallor upon his face, the spectators for the first knew that he had not a winning hand!

They realized it better when Gold-Button Bill pulled in the ivories.

But, what surprised them most, was to see a stranger promptly seat himself opposite the Professional!

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW MAN IN THE GAME.

PLAIN and evident it was, that the stranger who plumped himself down in the chair Judson Cameron had occupied, meant business.

There was nothing extraordinary in his appearance. He ranked with the commonplace business men who frequented the Ark. His stature was medium; he wore a full, brown beard, and his hair, what was visible, was a few shades darker—for his hat, a bruised-up Derby, was crowded down upon the back part of his head.

What part of his face was not covered by beard wore rather a waggish expression; his

eyes were keen, black, magnetic; his hands were as white as a woman's. He was commonly dressed, and looked, as a whole, ill-calculated to compete, at cards, with a man of Gold-Button Bill's brilliant aspect.

"Well, what do you want?" the Professional demanded, regarding the stranger with a searching gaze.

"Waal, ef ye hain't no objeckshuns, pard, I'd like ter swell that aire pile o' yourn a few more thousan'. I do like ter see ther smile o' prosperity flit across ther face o' every galoot wot hes got luck!"

"You mean you want to relieve me of some of this surplus?" William replied, with a smile of sarcastic significance.

"Kerect as a flapjack on a gridiron!" the stranger assented. "Now, ef thar is one thing I do admire more than another, et aire candor. Of coarse, 'cordin' ter ther constertoochin' an' by-laws o' Hoyle, ef I kin redooce yer pile, my heart will exesute forty per cent. more fluctuations per minut than tho' you peel me own purse. D'yee see?"

"I comprehend; but I believe I am quite content to quit with the snug little pile I have won."

"Pshaw! I wouldn't wipe my nose on sech winnin'. Ef thar's fun at all, in keerds, it's when ye scoop in half a million. That's wot brings ther roseate an' healthful blush ter ther face o' ther winner."

"Presumably!" Gold Button Bill replied. "Men of our stamp very seldom strike such snaps, however. Far from having half a million dollars to back your bombast, I dare say you have not that many mills!"

"Ye dasn't bet yer pile o' ivories thar ag'in' my life that I haven't half a million of dollars in my possession."

Fierce and precise this challenge was uttered, and it caused Gold Button Bill to open his eyes a bit wider.

The realization had suddenly struck him that the stranger had equally as much business in him: a mad hornet.

"Well, maybe not, pard. If you are so flush, I'd just as lief clean you out as any other man, since you seem anxious to part with your cash!"

"Kerect! Yer bracin' up beauteiful now. I do admire grit, even ef it is manifested in the kickativa' perpensities of a mountin' mule. Now, let me tell ye, my name is Josiah Slobber, an' I'm a sharp! My infantile days were passed in a cradle made o' needles, an' I war reared on razor broth. Ef I war ter play ye eucher, I'd paralyze ye; wi' poker, I'd wreck yer hull constitution, an' as fer other games, why ther'd not be a grease-spot left o' ye when I got thr'u';—this is all because I could cheat ye right out o' yer eyes an' ye never know it. There's but one little honest game I knows on, ter gamble on. Ye shuffles ther keerds plentiful, an' lays 'em down on ther table, back up. Yer draws one, then I draws one—off'm top—an' so on in succession, 'til every keerd is drawn. As fast as we draws 'em, we planks 'em, face down, wi'out lookin' at 'em. When all aire drawed, we makes our bets, as ter who has ther most legal aces b'longin', ter one pack o' keerds. One hevin' most, takes t'other's money. Fair?"

"Certainly, if drawn fair."

"Good! Roll up yer sleeves ter yer elbows, as I will, an' shell out yer money, 'til every cent aire in checks. I'll do ditter, 'til our piles aire even in amount—then we draw, an' ther winnin' man scoops ther boodle wi'out opposition from ther loser!"

"Who deals?"

"You, if you like!"

Gold-Button Bill eyed Slobber a moment sasically.

"See here—what's your game?" he demanded savagely. "I can put two hundred thousand dollars, in checks, on this board. You can't!"

"My game is to equal what you plank. If I win, all right. If you win, I will be just so much out of pocket!"

"Very well. Here, checks—the value of this money in ivories. It will give me just two hundred checks, valued at one thousand dollars apiece!"

A murmur of astonishment ran through the crowd.

Here was gambling without a parallel in the memory of the oldest miner in the room.

The checks were given the Professional in exchange for his money.

"Now jest give me two hundred o' them aire critters!" Mr. Slobber calmly said, tossing a large roll of bills over to Browne, the checkman.

Browne counted the money, looked sharp at each bill, and then counted out two hundred checks upon the table.

The two towering columns were stacked side by side; then a new sealed pack of cards was handed to the Professional.

He broke off the wrapper and shuffled and riffled the cards, for a minute; then, planked them upon the table, at the same time laying hold of his revolver with his right hand.

"Draw!" he said, coolly. "If you have more aces belonging to the pack than I, you rake the pot."

Mr. Slobber drew a cocked revolver also; then the drawing for the aces began.

It was rather an unusual sight.

Dozens of men stood about the table, fully as eager and excited as the two men who were playing for the enormous stakes.

The Professional was nerved to instant desperate action; so was Slobber.

Each man, with hawk-like intensity, watched the hands of his opposite, noting every movement of the muscle, so that there could be no more than one card drawn at the time, or any extras worked in.

An attempt to cheat, on the part of either, would have been a signal for a fusilade of bullets, and there were ten chances to one that one of the sharps would have dropped forever out of the game.

Therefore, the weapons in a measure acted as a preventive against cheating.

Slobber drew the first card from the top of the pack and placed it on the table, without looking at the spot side. The Professional followed suit; then Slobber, and so on, in succession, respectively, until the pack became rapidly reduced in size.

Then the two men began to draw slower, as if to estimate how many aces yet remained in the pack.

"Hyar comes ther interesting part, as ther bank clerk sed, when he began ter figger up shortages," Slobber remarked. "Ef I win yer pot, stranger, I've er notion ter start a hum' for old an' decrepit keerd sharps, whar they kin sleep on faro tables, eat off'n card tables—an'—"

"Last card—pull!" Gold-Button Bill interrupted, sharply.

Slobber pulled it in, with an obliging smile.

"Muhee obleegod!" he said. "Now, let me see. I have the ace o' hearts, the ace o' spades, the ace o' clubs, and the ace o' diamonds. How does that strike you?" and the winner's revolver was on a level with the Professional's heart, as the four ace spots were exhibited.

Gold Button Bill uttered a fierce curse, as he perceived that he had lost.

"My ivories!" Slobber said, raking them in. "Sorry fer ye, but sech is fate! Here, cashier—just give me the collat' for these 'ere!"

"Stop! Do not cash those checks, at the peril of your life!" cried a ringing voice. "The man who won them is Deadwood Dick, the Revenue Collector!"

The voice was a woman's, too!

CHAPTER V.

THE BANKER'S DAUGHTER.

THE Camerons lived in a shanty, which although built of rough boards, was a good size, and of more pretentious appearance than any other habitation, in Faro Flats, except it were Colonel Noah's Ark.

Suitable furniture had been provided by the banker and consequently, the interior of the abode presented a comfortable and homelike, if not exactly, an elegant appearance, to the eye.

On the evening of the extraordinary games, at the Ark, Miss Chrissie Cameron was seated in an easy-chair, in the cheery parlor, engaged in reading a society novel, for which style of literature she had an inordinate fondness.

She was attired in a pretty evening costume, that added much to her rare personal beauty, and she was the only occupant of the apartment, Coral having gone out to call on a neighbor.

She was deeply engrossed in the perusal of the novel, when there came a light tap on the door, which was immediately opened, admitting Mr. Hal Hartley.

"Good-evening, Chris!" he said, drawing a chair near her, and seating himself. "So it is possible, I've caught you alone, for once, eh?"

"It seems so. Is there anything extraordinary, in that?" and she arched her eyebrows, with a pretty smile.

"Yes, I believe there is, since I have noticed you took particular pains to avoid meeting me alone, during the past week—in fact, ever since—"

"Since when?"

"Since I asked you for your hand!"

"Well, maybe I have. You know I as good as told you that it would be impossible for me to wed you, Mr. Hartley."

"But gave me no reason."

"Certainly not. A young lady does not always feel compelled to state the why's and wherefores of her preferences."

"Maybe not—maybe not. I however, know of more reasons why you refuse to marry me, than you think of!"

There was a spice of triumph in Hartley's tone, as he uttered the declaration, and Miss Chrissie shot him a quick, inquiring glance.

"As my father's clerk, I, fail to see why you should have taken pains to accumulate any information, whatever!" she said, haughtily. "I dare say, if papa were aware of your interest, he could find you more profitable employment for your time."

"Now! now, Chrissie, you are too bad on me. Not a month ago, you acknowledged a fondness for me, and now—now you are as cold as a block of ice!"

"I am not. It was simply a delusion, that caused me to believe I cared for you, Hal Hartley—I do not love you."

"There is rattle-headed Coral—she adores you; then why persecute me with your attentions?"

"If it is really persecution, you shall not be troubled again, I promise. I regard Coral only as a sister—you, far differently. You are playing it high-handed, Christine Cameron; but mind me, a day will come when you will not so lightly spurn aside Hal Hartley's honest love!"

"Sir!"

"I mean every word of it!" he went on, passionately. "You think I do not know of your past, eh?—how you became entangled in a marriage affair at the Eastern boarding-school, and your father had to go and fetch you away, and pay a round sum of money to hush matters up!"

Christine Cameron's face was pale, and her eyes sparkled angrily.

Hartley went on:

"Of course a divorce was quietly got for you, but whether it would stand the test of the courts, or not, is doubtful—very doubtful. If your father knew of your ingratitude toward him, I hardly suppose he would take so much fatherly interest in you. Supposing I were to tell him that I caught you in the bank, not many nights ago, endeavoring to open the safe?"

"Who has a better right?" she flashed. "Dare to mention that, sir, and I'll procure your disbarge."

"I have not threatened to expose you, yet; so do not be too severe. Were I a villainous lover, I might choose to use the point against you; but I am not. Your secret is safe with me, still I want you to understand that you are to a certain extent in my power. Another thing: I am in possession of another important secret of yours."

"It is false! I have no other secret, sir!"

"Pardon me, but I feel constrained to doubt your veracity, Chrissie. You see, I always make sure of a point before I consider it mine. You want me to tell you the secret?"

"No!"

She arose as she haughtily uttered the word.

"It is useless to prolong this interview."

"Perhaps. But—stop; allow me to get through. You are, for a mere girl, a bold, designing woman, Christine, and Heaven only knows what your end will be. Here, and forever, we part—except as friends. This postal-card came into my possession, through the evening mail. *Au revoir!*" and arising, he tendered her the card, and bowed himself from the room.

And Chrissie?

She stood there in the middle of the room with her gaze riveted upon the card, her figure drawn rigid and a deathly pallor upon her fair, patrician face.

A man's chirography was that upon the card, and but a few words; but they evidently meant much to her.

The following were the contents:

"DEAR WIFE:—I hear the old man has struck it rich, and is on his taps again. Good. I shall make it a point to call upon you soon."

"Yours forever,

"WILLIAM FINK."

"He coming here?" escaped Chrissie's lips, as the card fluttered to the floor. "Great Heaven, this is more than I can bear. I thought him dead. Papa has assured me that he was. But, it cannot be so, for this is his writing. I would recognize it, anywhere. He comes to extort

more money, eh? Well, let him come. This is as good a place to face him in as anywhere, and he shall find, when he arouses me, he has wakened a sleeping tigress. One fatal step shall not be the ruination of my whole life if I have to adopt the tactics of a Lucretia Borgia. Come on, William Fink, and see what a reception will await you! Christine Cameron, the school-girl, and Christine Cameron, the banker's daughter, are not one and the same person, as you will find, to your cost."

CHAPTER VI.

IT WAS DICK!

THE cry rung through the gaming-room of the Ark, with startling distinctness, and caused every one to look around, in quest of the author of the cry.

But, if it was a woman who spoke, as the voice seemed to indicate, where was she?

She was certainly not present in the room, in the garb of her own sex, for it was the colonel's invariable and strict order that the female-element be excluded from the freedom of the rooms devoted to games.

At the sound of the voice, and as the words rung out, the man, Slobber, leaped to his feet, and glared about, as if stung by an adder.

"Hilloa!" he roared. "Who dares ter accuse me o' bein' ary one else than Josiah Slobber! Show me ther galoot, or galootess, whoever he or she may be, an' darn my buttons ef thair ain't a funeral byer, in less than three jerks o' a band-organ crank. I doan't allow no one to malign and asperse my kerrickter, no more I do, an' I kin lick blue-blazes outen airy gerloot w'ot durst utter 'em words, ag'in, I kin!"

The singular challenge was not uttered, again; evidently, it was not necessary, for revolvers were drawn, on all sides, and a number of men stood near each door and window, ready to prevent any attempt to escape.

Colonel Noah Norton then strode forward, towering like a giant.

"Who uttered the declaration that this feller is Deadwood Dick?" he demanded, authoritatively.

"Yas, that's what I wanter know," chimed in Slobber. "I'll spill sum gore heer ef I sight the galoot!"

"The man is Deadwood Dick, in disguise. Tear off that beard and see for yourselves."

Again the feminine voice rung out, but not a man in the room could tell which person had uttered the words.

"The matter shall be investigated," the colonel said, emphatically. "Looke here, friend Slobber, just give me a pull at those whiskers of yours."

And the proprietor of the Ark reached quickly forward and seized hold of the glossy beard of the card-sharp.

A vicious jerk—

And the effect was startling.

Off came the false whiskers, and also the Derby hat, revealing the clear-cut face of Deadwood Dick, and allowing his long, wavy hair to fall over his shoulders.

For an instant a silence most intense followed. Not a man stirred; the fall of a pin upon the floor could have been heard; then the ominous click! click! click! was heard, as revolvers came to full cock.

"Deadwood Dick, you are my prisoner," the colonel cried. "You've been playing a nice little game, but have played it a bit too fine. Will you surrender?"

"Most as uredly!" Dick answered, with undaunted coolness. "You don't suppose I'd try to run the gantlet wi' three-score o' sixes smiling at me, do you? But, I say, I won those checks, fair and square, and I want the collateral tur them."

"You will have the pleasure o' wantin', then," Norton declared, grimly. "Ye'r a criminal, an' ye hev got no right ter the money. I'll take keer o' that, myself, until yer heirs lay claim ter it. Come! throw up your hands, ef you don't want ter be riddled."

Dick took a swift glance at his surroundings, and saw that there was no possibility of making his escape.

The room was comfortably filled with rough-characters of the mines, and nearly every man grasped a six-shooter.

An expression of stern determination was visible on each face, and it was at once evident that the prospect in store for the Revenue Collector was not what could be called appetizing or pleasant.

Seeing that there was no chance for him but to surrender, Dick threw up his hands as ordered.

At the same instant there were a number of rifle-shots heard, simultaneously, and the gambling-room became as suddenly enveloped in darkness, the crashing of glass telling the mischief the bullets had done.

Then a wild yell of rage burst from the lips of the miners, and from every quarter bullets were rained in upon the spot where Dick had last been seen.

There were shrieks of pain, threats, intermingled with fierce curses; the crowd, of a mind, rushed together, and a savage conflict ensued—a mixed melee, in utter darkness, where friend struck friend, without mercy, or knowledge of what he was doing, more than furiously trying to fight his way out.

It was a battle, literally, of demons.

How long it would have waged on, is hard to determine, had not some one, more thoughtful than the rest, lit a lamp.

The illumination had the effect to instantly check the firing, and the bloodthirsty crowd glared about them, to behold the havoc they had wrought.

A dozen dead men were more or less badly wounded.

Pools of blood stood upon the floor, in different places, while weapons, shattered glass, and broken furniture, were scattered about.

There was a moment of grim silence as the gang contemplated the mischief that had been done; then Col. Norton limped forward, having been wounded in the calf of one of his legs.

"Stop this fightin'," he roared. "Haul over 'em as is dead, an' see if the road-agent cuss has escaped?"

It needed but a brief search among the bodies of the slain to prove that Deadwood Dick had indeed effected his escape.

How, was a mystery, but he was certainly gone.

He had been in their midst at the time the lights had become extinguished, and it must indeed have been a miraculous bit of agility that had taken him out of the way, ere the fusilade was fired.

"He's not here!" was the shout.

"Then, give him chase!" roared the colonel. "Five hundred dollars reward to the galoot that takes him, dead or alive!"

It was a stimulus that had immediate effect, for a large body of the unwounded miners flushed from the Ark.

The dead and wounded were then cared for, and in half an hour, the games were going on, the same, as if no "slight unpleasantness" had occurred.

Gold-Button Bill had turned up missing, during the melee.

Later, it was discovered that Browne, who had held the cash of the extraordinary game, was also missing!

What had become of him, or the large sum of money in his possession, was a mystery.

A search for him was also inaugurated, but he was nowhere to be found, about the camp.

And, while the fruitless search for him was going on, Deadwood Dick was riding away, into the mountains, without exercising any particular degree of speed, feeling satisfied that, though he might be sought for, he was not likely to be easily found.

"No one knew who betrayed my identity at the gaming-table—no one but me!" he muttered, darkly, as he rode along. "Did she think I did not know her voice I wonder? Ah! Calamity, report may have you dead, but I see that you are, still, most revengefully alive. So I have got to fight you, eh, in addition to the others? Beware that you do not mistake me, for, dear as we were once to each other, deadly can we now become."

There could be no mistaking the bitterness of his tone. His face too was gloomy of expression, and his eyes gleamed fitfully.

"I owe my escape to Me-no-toga, I presume, for I have scarcely a doubt but what he shot out the lights. But, what will he say when I tell him I lost the money he gave me? Nothing, perhaps, and yet, I reckon he'll not like it."

For an hour he rode, and then turned into the bed of a shallow creek that gushed out of a dark deep ravine, the beetling walls of which were barely far enough apart to admit the passage of a horse.

After progressing by this route for several hundred yards, the rocks overhead grew into an arch, shutting out all view of the heavens. A little further on, the passage widened into a wide subterranean chamber, at one side of which the creek had its source, from a gushing spring.

A bed of embers glowed brightly on the

cavern bottom, and a lantern was also suspended from a spur of rock.

Other camp-life paraphernalia were strewn about.

"The White Owl has not returned yet," Dick said, as he dismounted. "He may be waiting to learn if I am in Faro Flats, among the slain!"

He stirred up the embers, and added more fuel; then, seating himself, patiently waited for the chief's return.

He had not long to wait.

The splash of horses' feet was presently heard in the water, and Me-no-toga rode out of the passage into the cavern.

Nor was he alone.

Bound and helpless, across his saddle bows, he carried a prisoner, and that prisoner no less a personage than Browne, the checkman, who had held the large gaming stake of money.

Behind the chief, in a large sack, was another object, which had something of the appearance of a doubled up human body.

"Ugh! Me-no-toga back!" the chief declared, as he cast the body of Browne upon the ground and dismounted. "Me-no-toga save Dick's life!"

"Bet yer life you did!" Dick replied, heartily, as he sprung to his feet, and thrust forward his hand. "If you hadn't doused that glim, the chances are big that I'd be dangling from a limb about this time. But, how did ye get this hyer prisoner?"

"Ugh! Ketch um easy. He leab big wig-wam jest afore you; Me-no-toga gobble um!" and an expression of huge satisfaction shot athwart the chief's countenance.

"Good! Did you get the money?"

"Ugh! Yes, heap lot! Him goin' run away; White Owl stop 'im. Nebber run 'gin'!"

"What! Why, he is dead, sure enough. Why did you bring him here?"

"Use 'im, bymeby. Got nudder prisoner!" and approaching the horse, the chief unloosened the big sack, and placed it tenderly on the ground. He then untied it, and assisted to escape therefrom—

A remarkably pretty young lady!

Deadwood Dick looked his utter astonishment, as he saw the lovely apparition of the bag.

"Well, well! I'll be eat up by painters. Where did you get her, and who is she, chief? Your daughter?"

White Owl shook his head slowly.

"No. Pale face squaw. She not so purty as Fairy Face. Me-no-toga capture her. Hold her 'til git Fairy Face!"

The girl, who was about seventeen, rather petite of figure, well dressed, and very pretty, stood regarding the chief and Dick with anxiety and alarm.

There were traces of weeping upon her face, and it was plain that she knew not what to make of her strange situation.

Dick took a step nearer, and doffed his hat respectfully.

"Excuse me, miss!" he said, "but I beg you will not feel distressed at your position, as I see you cannot comprehend the cause of your capture. Will you give me your name, please?"

She looked somewhat reassured at his pleasant address, probably not expecting it.

"I am Coral Cameron, sir, and my father is the banker of Faro Flats," she said, in reply. "As you say, sir, I am at loss to comprehend why I am subjected to this sort of treatment."

"I will explain, as far as I am able, Miss Cameron, and will, at the same time, assure you that you need have no fears for your personal safety. This Indian, who captured you, is the White Owl, who owns the land where Faro Flats now stands. He was driven from his possessions, and his beautiful daughter, the Fairy Face, is held a captive among your people, by one or more designing persons, who evidently hope to make money out of holding her. The chief has not been able to obtain any tidings of her, and therefore has captured you, and proposes to hold you a prisoner until his daughter is returned to him; then, you will be safely restored to your people. Is this correct, White Owl?"

"Um! Dick speak right!" the chief said, gruffly, and turned away.

"So, you see, you are not so bad off as you might be!" Dick added. "All that will be asked is that you do not try to escape, and I will do all I can, to make your stay as pleasant as possible."

Coral listened with attention, and regarded Dick wonderingly as he spoke.

"When do you think I will be released?" she asked, when he was through.

"That I cannot tell you. We shall make a diligent search for Fairy Face, and as soon as

we get possession of her, you will be taken back to Faro Flats."

"But will I not be rescued?"

"Not very likely. A month could easily be consumed in searching for you, without this retreat being found."

"Are you Deadwood Dick, sir?"

"I am so called."

"Very well. I shall not feel so much concerned, for I have heard of you, and that you were honorable in your treatment of ladies."

"Thank you. You can feel perfectly at rest on that score. Pray be seated by the fire, and I will partition off a corner of the cavern for your accommodation. Our furniture is not of Fifth avenue regulation, but we will make you as comfortable as possible."

And so pleased was the dashing Revenue Collector with Miss Cameron's beauty, that she was sure of kind treatment while she remained a captive.

CHAPTER VIII.

A COMPACT.

WHEN another morning dawned over the young town of Faro Flats, it found matters in no less a feverish state of excitement than the night before.

The disappearance of Coral Cameron had been reported, too; but even this was not all.

Posted upon the door of the Ark was a notice, in large letters:

"Be it known to all men by these presents that I, Me-no-toga, the White Owl, have sold unto Deadwood Dick my tract of land in the valley of the Osceola, and he is, therefore, his own agent, and dealings must be made with him personally. I, Me-no-toga, will seek only for revenge, and to that end that my successor gets his rights."

"(Signed), ME-NO-TOGA,

"The White Owl."

This created not a little consternation, for the miners had little reason to doubt but what Deadwood Dick would, in some of the inexplicable ways peculiar to him, collect his revenues in spite of their resistance.

Before the camp was fairly as it, Miss Christine Cameron, contrary to her usual habits, was out of doors, and taking a morning walk. She was tastily attired and looked very pretty, but for the fact that there was a troubled, restless expression about her eyes.

She passed beyond the limits of the camp, and continued along the stage trail until a bend in the gulch hid her from view of any one in the town. Then she sat down upon a low moss-covered rock, and waited, at the same time listening intently.

Presently, the sound of horses' feet reached her hearing, and a man dashed around the bend, drawing rein near where she was seated, and dismounting.

It was the gambler-sport, Gold-Button Bill.

Miss Cameron arose to her feet as he approached her, and warned him, by an imperative wave of her hand to keep at a respectful distance.

"There! stay where you are. We can talk quite as well a few feet apart!" She spoke coldly and haughtily.

At which Gold-Button Bill stared.

"Hello!" he ejaculated. "Why, I thought you had sent for me to welcome me to your arms! What's gone cross-grained with you?"

"Nothing. I received your card and brought about this interview for the sole purpose of finding out what brings you here to Faro Flats."

"Ah! then, I presume you haven't the slightest idea what brought me here, fair Christine?"

"No, sir, I have not."

"Then, I will try to enlighten you, my dear. I came part of the way by rail, part of the way by hoss, and the balance by my individual shanks. Plain, now?"

She made a gesture of impatience.

"Your attempt to be facetious is not appreciated!" she declared. "Why have you come here? That is the question."

"And one I am not able to answer with Washington truthfulness. You see, I am not really posted as to my prime object in coming here, myself. Possibly, the most superlative magnet of attraction was your blooming self. Gods! but you have grown pretty since I saw you last—and, too, how your feet have grown!"

And he laughed wickedly.

"Sir! I did not come here to banter words with you, or be insulted. If you will not cease your insults and talk business, I will return to the camp."

"How in blazes can I talk business when I ain't in the mood? What shall I say, or do?"

"Tell me why you have followed us here."

"Well, if I must, I suppose I must. I learned that the old man was here, and as he didn't succeed in killing me out East, I thought I would come here and give him another chance. I met him at the card-table last night, when I happened to be pretty flush, and when he quit, he was broke—out over a hundred thousand dollars. Guess if there was to be a run on his bank, to-day, he'd rather collapse!"

Christine started.

"Then you think he is virtually bankrupt?"

"Bank broke, rather!"

"And you have his money?"

"No. It was all won from me by a chap called Deadwood Dick—my own with it, too. Then, there was a big shootin' scrape, and the cuss got away, and so did the stake-holder. I'm broke to my last cent!"

"Didn't my father recognize you?"

"I think not; anyhow, he showed no signs of doing so. I don't look very William Finkified, eh?"

"Your vulgar make-up does greatly alter your appearance. You look more like a Western sport now than an Eastern collegiate. Where did you get so much money to gamble with? You were not worth a dollar the last time I met you!"

"Oh! that don't make a bit of difference. I'm one of these peculiar chaps what's in luck one day and out of it the next. I have a prime fashion of acquiring collateral on very short notice—a mechanical sort of way of getting it, you see, which I shall needs have to put into operation right soon. If your amiable sire cannot furnish me with a small loan, to restore my depleted exchequer to something of its former strength and glory, then I shall have to look for some one that will. Do I presume too much in wondering if you haven't got a ten or a twenty which you would lend me, with pleasure, fair Christine?"

"No, I have not got any money for you," she returned, sharply, "unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you want to work for me!"

"Dearest, fairest and loveliest Christine, you know you have but to command me, and your slightest wish is law unto me!"

"Nonsense! Save the wear and tear on your jaw, and bring more truth into your utterances. You are a first-class knave, and you know that I know it. Now, so far as we are concerned, personally, we are in no way either friends or lovers. You came here with the main object of extorting money. In that you would fail. You must, therefore, do the next best thing. If you want money you must earn it. You must lay aside your mask of hypocrisy, and stand out in your full character of villain and wretch."

"All for a few paltry dollars?"

"Exactly—not exceeding twenty, at the most!"

"Your liberality is really startling!" he said, with a dry laugh. "Why, beloved Christine, it is not necessary that I should labor for you, when by cutting a button from my garments, I am possessed of enough lucre to begin speculation on. However, if you have a mission to be performed, perhaps we can strike up some sort of a bargain, providing you explain."

"Very well. I have reason to believe that you will want to work for me. There is no reason why you cannot make money, if you are half as sharp as I believe you to be."

She was silent a moment as if hardly sure whether to trust him or not, then, after studying his face, with a searching glance she went on:

"Well, listen, and I will tell you what I want done. You have heard about the daughter of the chief, Me-no-toga, who is said to be held a prisoner in this camp?"

"I have heard something about her, yes."

"Do you know where she is?"

"No."

"Do you think you could find her?"

"Possibly. Why?"

"This much. She must be found and put out of the way beyond a possibility of her ever coming to light again."

"Ah!"

"Exactly. She is in my way and must be removed."

"How can she, an Indian girl be in your way?"

"That does not matter to you. She is, and that's all there is of it. She must die, and that too, at once. You must do the job!"

She spoke excitedly and fiercely.

It was evident that she was dead in earnest, a fact which caused Fink to stare.

"Well! well!" he commented. "You're

really a bloodthirsty beauty, eh? Seeing that is the case, I can't say I am sorry that you no longer lay claim to me as your hubby. So you want me to kill this Injus girl?"

"I do—or, that is, remove her so that there will never be a possibility of her being brought to light."

"Humph! I'd really like to know what pretty little game you're playing now, Christine?" and Mr. Gold-Button William looked decidedly as if he meant what he said.

"It does not concern you as I told you before!" the banker's daughter replied. "You do my bidding and you shall be well paid."

"Twenty dollars, eh?"

"That many thousand, sir, if I win my point. I am playing for large stakes and I mean to win. By doing my bidding you help me to do so and are entitled to the full extent of my liberality. Is it a bargain?"

Fink eyed her a moment shrewdly, as if estimating how much truth there was in her declaration. His faith in her reliability evidently was not of the most exalted order.

"You are sure I will get a whack worth the trying for?" he asked.

"Yes—if you forever remove the Indian girl known as the Fairy Face."

"Where am I to find her?"

"That I do not know. She is secreted somewhere in Faro Flats, and you must find her."

"All right. In lieu of any better employment, I reckon I'll buckle on to your job. Give's a saw-buck to get a square meal with, and I'm yours!"

She gave him a ten-dollar note and then he vaulted into his saddle and galloped away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BANK "DEFICKILTY."

At an hour before the usual time for opening the Faro Flats bank, that morning, Judson Cameron was at the bank, and seated in his private office.

He was alone, and there was a haggard, worried look upon his face, and his eyes showed even more plainly that he had had little or no sleep, on the previous night.

He was awaiting eagerly for Hal Hartley to arrive, so that he could get down to the truth of his financial standing.

Hartley knew all the particulars of the bank's liabilities, assets and circulation, which the banker, himself, did not.

He only knew that he had foolishly lost a fortune in money, at the gambling table, the night before, in addition to which Colonel Noah Norton held his check for one hundred thousand dollars—a larger amount of cash than the banker believed the bank had, on hand, deposits and all, there having been a heavy draft on him, from an Eastern bank, a few days, before, on account of his loss in a stock speculation.

If it should turn out that he had not enough individual assets on hand, to overbalance his liabilities to Norton, he had no doubt but what there would be a run on the bank, and it would be forced to close its doors.

In such a case he knew that his life was in jeopardy, for the rough men of Faro Flats, were not as lenient as Wall street creditors. These men of the mines had a little way of settling such difficulties with the revolver with a promptness that was decisive.

Then, too, the banker's mind was not troubled with financial matters alone. The discovery of Coral's disappearance, which had been made shortly after his leaving the gaming-room, was a shock that had struck him with terrible force, and unnerved him in a considerable degree for the trials before him.

Of course her absence was a matter of utter mystery to him, and the failure of the searching parties to find any trace of her only doubled his anxiety.

He was consequently in a state bordering on frenzy when young Hartley arrived at the bank, ready for his daily duties.

"No news from Coral, yet, Mr. Cameron?" he inquired, anxiously.

"None whatever," the banker replied. "I cannot understand what it means. Who, in God's name, could have abducted her—or, if she was not abducted, what can have become of her?"

"I am inclined to the opinion that she was abducted, and we shall hear something of her, before the day is out!" Hartley said, cheerily. "The fact that Deadwood Dick was in the town, last night, may have some connection with the case. You know, Dick and the Crow chief, are acting in concert, and Me-no-toga claims that some person in Faro Flats holds his

daughter a captive. May this not have led him to seize upon your daughter, Coral, in turn?"

"I had not thought of that. But we have no time to talk of it now, Hartley. There is an even graver matter on hand. What time is it?"

"Nearly ten o'clock, sir."

"Too bad. I am seriously afraid we cannot open the doors, my boy. I—I—did you hear anything said on the street?"

Hartley could not repress an anxious look.

"Yes, sir; I heard you had lost heavily, at the Ark, last night."

"Anything more?"

"Well—no, not in particular, except that the colonel, who holds your check, feels rather shaky, and swears up and down that he will make trouble if the check is not honored on presentation. The other depositors are somewhat anxious, and there are a number of them collected before the door, waiting for the bank to open."

"There will be a run then?"

"Without a doubt, sir."

"And we cannot stand it?"

"I am afraid not. How much is the colonel's check?"

"One hundred thousand."

"Phew! You must have been crazy, last night. Either the depositors or the colonel will have to suffer by your folly, as we haven't over a hundred and twenty on hand, and two-thirds of that is subject to depositors' draft."

The banker could not repress a groan, as he arose from his chair and paced excitedly to and fro.

He had all along been considered one of the soundest men in the camp, as well as a keen financier, and the few miners who had saved anything out of their earnings had freely trusted them to the keeping of his bank.

Reverses in stock speculation and at the card-table, however, had drawn largely on him, and ruin now stared him in the face.

Young Hartley watched his employer anxiously and pityingly, well judging how he felt.

"Oh, Heaven! is there no way I can get out of this trouble?" Mr. Cameron cried. "Descend to poverty and dishonor in one fell swoop like this? It seems too horrible! Can't you think of some plan, boy?"

"I am afraid not, sir—not unless you can get a private interview with the colonel, and get him to put off his claim until the temporary flurry is over."

"Bah! He wouldn't do that; he'd rather crush me. It was for that purpose he offered to loan me the money. He knew I would not be able to meet it."

"Why is this?"

"Oh, a matter of private rivalry. He covets several claims I have which are far richer than his own. One in particular, which gives promise of an extraordinary yield, he has repeatedly tried to purchase of me."

"If the bank fails, he will lay hold of these claims, I presume?"

"Yes, and I shall not have the power to prevent him."

Hartley glanced at his watch, and took a peep out of the front window.

"It is five minutes of ten, and there are fully a hundred people collected outside!" he said. "It appears to be a prevailing opinion that the doors will not open."

"Neither they can until we can get relief. You had better post a notice in the window to the effect that we have closed for the purpose of finding how we stand."

With a grave countenance, which betrayed the fact that he feared the consequences, Hartley set about obeying the order, when there came a ring at the private entrance bell.

"See who it is, and admit him if he be but one. It may be said!" Mr. Cameron declared.

Hartley answered the summons, and presently ushered in a roughly-attired, bearded man, who removed the false hirsute appendage promptly, revealing the clear-cut features of Deadwood Dick, whom, however, the banker had never seen.

Nor had Hartley.

"Good-morning!" Dick said, dropping into a seat. "This is Mr. Judson Cameron, I suppose?"

"It is, sir."

"Correct. I am Deadwood Dick, Revenue Collector of the town of Faro Flats!"

Both the banker and his clerk started violently, but Richard went on undauntedly.

"I am the chap who collects revenue for the benefit of Me-no-toga, whose lands this camp

occupies. I have also gained some reputation as a detective, a road-agent and a sport. Last night, with my customary eat luck, I escaped being made a subject for future resurrection, and got off whole. I also came into possession of a pretty little sum of money at cards. Some of it I believe did belong to you."

"You are right. I lost nearly all I had."

"Including some you didn't have, I believe," Dick smiled. "In other words, your bank does not feel like opening this morning?"

"Without relief reaches us, we shall be compelled to suspend payment, yes, sir. I have been financially unfortunate of late, and my bad-luck last night will prove to be the straw of my case that broke the camel's back."

"You know of no one then to whom to apply for relief?"

"I do not."

"What do you suppose would be the result if you do not open the doors of the bank?"

"I do not know, sir, but I have fears that there would be serious trouble."

"You are right. I am not a man who gives much odds for the ordinary run of two-footed humans, but I should believe it just as healthy in some other latitude, for me, if I were you, in case the bank did not open."

"Indeed! But if it is as bad as you would intimate, why do you come here to tell me of it?"

"I propose to help you if you, in turn, are disposed to help me. You may have seen, by Me-no-toga's manifesto, that he has turned his claims, in this valley, over to me. They are consequently mine, and I propose to have them, or the price of them."

Mr. Cameron shook his head.

"I have nothing to say for or against the real right to the land, as concerns you and the Indian!" he said. "But one thing I am positive of—nothing short of a real war would budge the present tenants!"

"So you may think. Such is not the case, I know, for the red skin has sworn vengeance, and unless you and I make different arrangements, you and every other claim-holder in the camp will be given a notice similar to this?" and Dick handed the banker a slip of paper, which was written in a good style of chirography, and contained the following:

"FARO FLATS, April —.

"Sir:—Due and sufficient notice has been given you, and further notice is hereby cited, that I, Me-no-toga, the White Owl, have sold to Deadwood Dick my tract of land in Osceola valley, upon which you have located a mining-claim, No. —, and are there squatting illegally and contrary to conformity with the laws governing real estate in this territory. The valuation of the parcel of land you occupy I have placed at the sum of \$—, and you are hereby warned to present yourself at the Bank of Faro Flats, within five hours after receipt of this notice, and either pay the whole sum of \$—, and receive a bill of sale for your claim, or pay the interest on said value, at 25 per cent, for the term of one year—or leave the camp of Faro Flats, under penalty of death, within above-named five hours. This is the last chance. On those who refuse to improve it Me-no-toga will surely visit vengeance, swift and sure.

"ME-NO-TOGA,
"The Terrible."

"How does that savor?" Dick demanded. "It means business, and you can see what is in store for those who will not respect the red-skin's rights!"

"But what have I to do about this?"

"This much. Surrender me your claims. I will then place you in possession of not only enough money to meet to-day's run, but make you my agent. You are to sell all claims and receive the cash for them, of course, accounting to me. It may appear to you like a dangerous undertaking; but I assure you no harm shall come to you."

"Do you propose to give me this money with which to pay my creditors?" Mr. Cameron asked, keenly.

"Yes—in exchange for your five claims. I understand that the bank owes about two hundred thousand. I will give you one of the two, and you can pay dollar for dollar."

"And not have anything left from the wreck? I cannot do that."

"It's your only move. If you shut up shop, you have to make an assignment anyhow, and get a bad name in the bargain."

"I would prefer that, sir, since I can't get out whole. The bank must close."

Dick was silent a few minutes, in deep reflection.

Out of doors the sound of voices grew louder, and more harsh.

It was several minutes past ten, and the rab-

ble were growing impatient because the doors did not open.

"I see but one course of action for you, Mr. Cameron!" Dick said, at length. "You make me your assignee, and retire from the bank, taking what you have on hand at present, but turning over to me your claims. This will give you capital to again start in the world!"

The banker eyed Dick a moment, shrewdly.

"Perhaps your proposal is my best plan," he said. "But pardon me, if I see why you, a total stranger, should care whether I went to the dogs, or not!"

"Neither I do, more than that I am playing the game of gold, and propose to possess this valley, with its placer mines. If we enter into negotiations, I am no longer Deadwood Dick, but Mr. Moses Levi, of New York. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. Tell me one thing more. Do you know aught concerning my daughter, Coral?"

"I do. She is safe, and all right. I also know something about your other daughter, too—but let that drop, now. There is time enough for those matters anon. You must make up your mind if you will accept my proposition at once, as there is no time to lose."

"I see no better avenue of escape than that which you have kindly offered me, sir. It shall be as you have proposed."

"Very well. Have your clerk post a notice in the window, announcing that you have made an assignment for the benefit of your creditors, and the bank will be open at noon, paying one hundred cents on the dollar. I will retire to yonder apartment, and when I return, Mr. Moses Levi, of New York, will take charge of the affairs of the bank."

Young Hartley set to work preparing for the change, not a little bewildered at the sudden turn affairs had taken.

The now noisy crowd that swarmed about the bank, were soon treated to a bulletin, posted in the bank window, which contained the following announcement:

"NOTICE!!

"Mr. Judson Cameron, owing to financial embarrassment, has made an assignment, for the benefit of depositors and creditors, who will be paid one hundred cents on the dollar, at noon, to-day. Mr. Moses Levi will henceforth conduct the business of this bank, with an ample capital."

"HALBURTON HARTLEY, Cashier."

The bulletin had the effect to create not a little commotion, for while it ameliorated the fears of some of the more impecunious depositors, others booted at the idea, in derision, and refused to take any stock in the report, until the bank was opened, and they got their money.

Colonel Noah Norton seemed not a little disappointed at reading the notice. He had come to the bank, armed to the teeth, to demand his money at the pistol's point; and now, it seemed that he was to be cheated out of that triumph—a fact that caused him some little chagrin.

He was, as Cameron had intimated, envious of any one who prospered as well or better than himself, and anxious to grind them down, or crush them, altogether.

Promptly at twelve o'clock, the doors of the bank swung open, and Hal Hartley filled his old position behind the counter, at the cashier's window.

The only other person visible about the bank, was a well-dressed man, with black curly hair a sleek, well-waxed black mustache and side-whiskers, who appeared to be very busy in the examination of bank-books, at a table behind the counter.

This was Mr. Levi, of New York, and no one in gazing at him, would have suspected that behind the clever, and certainly Jewish-looking make-up, was concealed the identity of Deadwood Dick.

"I wanter see the man w'ot drew this!" the colonel cried, savagely, throwing down Mr. Cameron's check. "I'm a galoot if I am goin' ter lose my hard earnin's, thr'u' ary bank bu'st-up, as long's there's lead an' bullets in Faro Flats."

"Do you wish the cash for this?" Hartley retorted, seizing the check, seeing that it was indorsed, and canceling it, at the same time shoving the colonel a big package of bills. "There you are, sir. Next!"

Norton seized the bills, with a snort, as if of disappointment, and made room for the next man, who proved to be Alf Boyle, a heavy depositor.

Inside of an hour, Faro Flats' bank had paid up every cent of its indebtedness, and several deposits had been re-made with the new owner.

The balance of the day passed, without any incident, worthy of mention, except that at about six o'clock, a placard was posted in the bank window, containing this notice:

"LEVI'S BANK."

"COLLECTIONS MADE. MONEY RECEIVED ON DEPOSIT. DRAFTS ON EASTERN BANKS. MONEY RECEIVED IN PAYMENT FOR CLAIMS PURCHASED OF THE ESTATE OF ME-NO TOGA, THE WHITE OWL, AND LEGAL BILLS OF SALE GIVEN."

Those who paused to read this were set to wondering not a little, and laughed grimly.

"I'd like ter see myself pay the shebang ary red, fer a claim!" a miner was heard to declare, and his sentiments seemed to be uniform with those of the entire camp.

Strange to say, however, no particular significance was attached to the notice, at the time, in connection with the bank's changing hands.

CHAPTER IX.

GOLD-BUTTON BILL'S ADVENTURE.

GOLD BUTTON BILL, after his interview with Christine Cameron, passed the day in pursuing careless inquiries, in regard to the missing Fairy Face.

But his success was not of the most encouraging order, despite the fact that he exercised all his natural keenness.

He had no difficulty in finding out who were the first white settlers in the Indian town, and all the particulars concerning the slaughter of the reds. His informants, too, all seemed to agree that there was little reason to doubt that Fairy Face had been taken a prisoner, and was secreted somewhere in the mining-camp.

But where, or who was her captor or captors, was a matter of which all professed ignorance who were "tackled" on the subject. Nor had they any opinions to express.

As a consequence, Gold-Button Bill was very little the wiser, for his search, when the shadows of darkness fell over the town.

He had, however, formed an impression, to the effect that more than one person was connected with the secrecy of the Indian beauty's whereabouts, from the fact that no one appeared to know anything about the matter, and yet, had the appearance of caring as little as they knew.

Fink, although his scruples may have been none of the best, owing to his wild and reckless manner of living, could hardly be classed as an out and-out ruffian, for his early training had not been altogether neglected, and he had much of honorable humanity left in him.

His marriage with Christine, when she was at Vassar, had been a hasty one, and it is probable might not have turned out badly had not Mr. Cameron hastily removed his daughter by bearing her away to his southern home. Fink followed and persisted in demanding his wife and his rights.

Furious from insults heaped upon him, to make him fight—for Cameron was as proud and hot-blooded a Southerner as ever lived, while Fink was of obscure parentage—Fink had gone into the *duello*, and fallen—mortally wounded, was the doctor's report, which had hastened Mr. Cameron's movement from that part of the country.

Fink had recovered, and was not long in learning of the Camerons' emigration to the Far West; also that a divorce had been secured for Christine, in another State, which would not pass court test.

So it happened, that, in the course of his wanderings, Fink, or as he was more frequently known, Gold-Button Bill, had dropped down in Faro Flats—not with any particular object in view, as related to the Camerons, but to see what they were doing.

The result of his meeting with Mr. Cameron and Christine has already been seen, and when he undertook the job proposed by Christine, it was without the least intention, on his part, to harm the Indian girl, should he be so lucky as to find her.

He knew Christine was up to some scheme, of more or less villainy, and he meant to find out what it was, and baffle her, out of revenge.

Then, too, he was now fully determined not to leave Faro Flats, until he should have an opportunity to recover at least his own original portion of the fortune Deadwood Dick had won from him.

After his day's endeavor to learn the whereabouts of Fairy Face, he repaired to the Ark, procured his supper, and went forth on the

street again; for it was a beautiful spring night, and the valley was swathed in mellow moonlight, and the air laden with the perfume of flowers.

A big train of stampedes, too, had just arrived in town, from an abandoned placer in the range below, and the street scene was exciting and lively.

Gold-Button Bill stood looking at the antics of a group of bullwhackers, who were celebrating their arrival by drinking the last jug of bug-juice in their wagon, and singing hilarious songs, when he felt a hand tap him upon the shoulder, and looked down to see a woman standing beside him, who was clad in black, and wore a thick vail tied closely over her face.

She was not up to the average hight of women, but was of good form.

"Excuse me!" she said, in a low, tremulous voice. "Would you be kind enough to come to the seventh tent, down yonder, pretty soon? You do not know me; nevertheless, I have something of utmost importance to tell you."

Bill eyed her a moment, suspiciously, and then took the cigar from between his teeth.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"One who would save your life. You are in deadly peril, and do not suspect it!"

"I am, eh? Well, all right. I'll be there."

He stared hard, after her, as she walked away. Her carriage was graceful and step elastic and he formed the conclusion that she was not an old woman.

"So I'm in danger, eh?" he chuckled. "Wonder from what source? It isn't every galoot that can have the honor of getting into danger, nowadays, I'll swear. I wonder what fer trap I will venture into! Maybe Christine is layin' fer me. Guess not, however. She's workin' a different racket!"

After about fifteen minutes, he sauntered along to the tented habitation the woman had indicated, and entered. He found her seated at a table, dressed the same, but with the vail removed from her face. It was a face, not yet old, and which had at one time been of marvelous beauty.

Consumption had blotted out much of this beauty, now, however, leaving the face thin, with protruding cheek-bones, and sunken cheeks and eyes.

The latter, however, still possessed a wonderful brilliancy.

"Be seated!" she said, motioning to a stool. "I will be through writing in a moment."

Bill obeyed, wondering if she was going to make her will and leave him a fortune. She wrote rapidly, and at last laid her pen aside.

"You are Gold-Button Bill," she said, more positively than interrogatively.

"I am. How did you know?"

"By hearing you call yourself that at the gaming saloon, last night."

"Ah! Were you there?"

"I was. It was I who uttered the warning which exposed Deadwood Dick!"

Gold-Button Bill gazed at her more searchingly, to see if she was telling the truth, but saw nothing but candor in her face.

"You are not a friend of Deadwood Dick, I infer then."

"No; I am not. Once we were friends—we were pards in many an adventure—we were even husband and wife. That time has past and gone. We now hate each other as cordially as we once loved. A foul lie separated us, and forever!"

"Why, forever? Difficulties have arisen, hundreds of times, but were healed over, and a happy future insured. Why should not such be the case between you and Deadwood Dick?"

She laughed bitterly.

"You would play peacemaker, eh? That is of no use. You could never fetch about a reconciliation between us. I am too bitterly his foe, until the last!"

"You are foolish. You have not long to live, and gain nothing, by hating!"

"Except vengeance. I have been a waif on the world too long to not thoroughly know myself!"

"Why have you sought this interview with me, then? I am in no way mixed up in your family jars, I trust!"

"More than you think. Deadwood Dick has sworn to have your life. He is the bitterest foe you ever had, and when he strikes you it will be your death-blow!"

"The deuce you say! Why, I never met the fellow, until last night, nor he me. What possible grudge can he have against me?"

"That I do not know—do not care to know. Suffice to say that I know whereof I speak, of his hatred for you, and he has it in mind to kill

you, to-night. Three times, to-day, he was in the act of drawing bead on you, but instinctively felt that I was watching him, and desisted from his purpose!"

Bill knocked the ashes from his cigar, and a faint expression of humor came to view, about his mouth.

"Well, this is singular," he said. "I am however much obliged to you for your information. I shall have to keep an outlook for this dangerous spouse of yours."

"You had better, if you don't want to die with your boots on! Are you going?"

"Yes. I have some little business to transact, yet, to-night."

"Well, take care of yourself, and remember my advice! Shoot Deadwood Dick at sight if you see him, or he will shoot you."

Bill nodded, and left the tent.

"If that woman was ever Deadwood Dick's wife!" he said, "she's gone in the upper story, now—that's flat and pat. She's crazy!"

CHAPTER X.

THE VALLEY VIOLET.

THAT night, when the moon's rays were the brightest, and shone upon nearly every exposed object beneath those Western skies, with weird distinctness, there stood, adown the valley, a mile from Faro Flats, upon a large square rock beside which grew a shady tree, the figure of a large, powerful man.

He was dressed in the full fantastic regalia of a Crow chieftain, was armed with a rifle and belt weapons, and made an imposing picture, as the moonlight shone upon his motionless figure.

It was Me-no-toga, the White Owl.

There was war-paint upon his face, and he looked stern and warlike; yet no one who saw him, would have supposed that forty years had passed over his head.

Erect and rigid he stood, as the minutes sped by, neither looking right or left, until the sound of an approaching footstep reached his hearing.

He then stepped down from the rock, and greeted the new-comer, who was attired fully as fantastically as the chief—her costume being an elegant one, such as sometimes worn by Indian princesses.

The features of the girl, who was of fine form, were more Caucasian than of Indian mold, but were olive tinged. The eyes were brilliant; the lips red; the hair dark, and the teeth as white as pearls.

The chief advanced, and seized her hand, warmly; the stern face now beamed with pleasure.

"The Valley Violet has come, and Me-no-toga glad," he said. "His heart is glad because the eyes of the Valley Violet make it beat fast. What news does the Valley Violet bring?"

"None of Fairy Face," the girl replied, dropping her gaze. "Valley Violet search for the great chief's daughter, but find no tidings of her. It makes her sad, because she would please the White Owl!"

"The Valley Violet has not to find Fairy Face to please the White Owl, because he is overjoyed when she is in his presence. The Valley Violet comes of the Pawnees, she tell Me-no-toga, but that makes no difference to him. He alone in the world; his heart lonely and want light. Valley Violet de light of Me-no-toga's heart, and his love is hers. Let Valley Violet put her hand in Me-no-toga's and he take her for his wife."

"No! no! Valley Violet alone in the world. Her people dead, and she is poor. The White Owl is rich, and should seek a wife who is like him."

"White Owl is not a fool," the chief said. "He have no use for riches. He loves the Valley Violet, and wants her for his wife."

"But, how can Me-no-toga love the Valley Violet when he see her but a few times? Then, too, the great chief love his lost child."

"Ugh! Love for Fairy Face not same like for Valley Violet. Mebbe nebber find Fairy Face, den hab only Valley Violet."

The girl was silent, keeping her gaze directed upon the ground.

"What are the Violet's thoughts that she does not gaze up, with her eyes like stars? Does she like another than Me-no-toga?"

"No! Valley Violet loves the White Owl. He is a great chief. But Valley Violet is a poor girl and must look out for herself. There is a handsome pale-face in Faro Flats who loves Valley Violet, and wants to make her his wife. He has lots of money to give to Valley Violet if she marry him."

"Pale-faces all dogs!" the chief cried, his face growing stern—"except Dick. He friend of Me-no-toga. Valley Violet marry Me-no-toga she

can have all the gold she can carry. He have big cache—heap lot gold—hoss-loads. It all Valley Violet's."

"Is the chief telling truth? He give it all to the Violet?"

"Yes—if she marry Me-no-toga."

"Then she will marry him. Let the great chief meet Valley Violet here to-morrow night at this hour, and show her his cache of gold. If it is as White Owl says, and he give it to her, the Valley Violet will then marry him."

"Ugh! It shall be as the Valley Violet wills. The White Owl will be here."

"And so will the Valley Violet. And perhaps she may find the Fairy Face and bring her, also."

After a few words more they separated, and the chief went toward his retreat in the mountains, while the Valley Violet returned leisurely toward Faro Flats.

Unknown to her, she was followed.

She was not long away from the trysting place, ere an uncouth figure dropped down from the branches of the tree beside the rock, and skulked after the maiden.

Strangest of all, it was a woman!

She was old, thin, wrinkled, hump-backed and hideous. The color of her skin betrayed the fact that in her handsomest days she had been a half-breed. Now, she looked like a human piece of withered parchment, drawn over a framework of bones.

Her hair was tangled and gray, her eyes sunken, and her whole aspect frightful, what with her ragged attire.

She was wonderfully spry, however, and it was plain that her age did not interfere with her locomotion.

When both she and Valley Violet were out of earshot from the trysting spot, a third party dropped from the tree, and started toward Faro Flats.

This was a man.

So, that, by two persons, had the chief's wooing been overheard that night.

Who they were, the future pages will develop!

CHAPTER XI.

TO THE RESCUE.

GOLD-BUTTON BILL had no doubt but what his convictions regarding the woman in black, were perfectly right; and so he let the matter drop from his mind, and returned to the Ark, where he found the customary habitues, as well as a large number of strangers.

No games for such an extraordinary amount as on the previous night were played for, however, and so the Professional, as he had chosen to style himself, loitered about, and looked over the crowd, studying the different types of character and nature made up in the throng.

In particular did he notice the ponderous proprietor of the Ark, Colonel Noah Norton, who stood leaning, in apparent idleness, against one of the pillars, or more appropriately posts, that supported the ceiling.

The colonel's face wore a surly, ill-humored expression, and his shaggy brows were drawn into a scowl.

His failure to get his money from Mr. Cameron, at the point of the pistol, evidently had left him in a state of bad humor which was hard to work off.

Though he barely glanced at the stream of people that was constantly entering and leaving the place, it was evident to Gold-Button Bill, that he was watching for some one.

This thought gave rise to another, in the Professional's mind, and he resolved to keep a quiet eye on the colonel, for a time, at all hazards.

His vigil was not a long one. The gambler and miner, Alf Boyle, soon entered, and slyly nudged the colonel, who coughed slightly, but made no further indication that he saw Boyle.

Boyle passed on to the bar, procured a drink and a cigar, and then took a stroll about the room; but he turned at length, with a yawn, and left the room, passing again directly in front of Norton.

Norton apparently paid no attention to him, but followed.

His eyes snapping with sudden aroused excitement, Bill also followed.

"If there ain't something brewing between them, I'll eat a Greaser!" he muttered. "I'll bet big odds that—"

He didn't express his opinion any further, but left the saloon, just in time to see Norton sauntering down the street, and Boyle going in the opposite direction.

"A blind!" Bill decided at once. "They

will meet somewhere, and I must witness that meeting."

He followed Boyle, keeping at a safe distance.

The gambler walked as far as there were any houses at the upper end of the street, and disappeared around a corner of what proved to be, when Bill reached it, a square tent.

Rounding the corner himself, the pursuer saw that Boyle was going toward the foot-hills, distant half a mile.

From the opposite end of the camp came Colonel Norton, whose course was such that he and Boyle would meet about at the side of the valley, where a big seam was perceptible in the mountain.

Gold-Button Bill saw at once that it would be a hard matter for him to continue the pursuit, on account of the moonlight, as Boyle looked behind him at regular intervals, and his discovery was inevitable; hence his only plan was to allow them to get out of sight among the foot-hills, and then try to follow by their tracks.

Patiently he bided his time, and at last was able to make a start. With swift strides he set out for the spot where he had seen the two men disappear.

In ten minutes he reached it, and found himself at the mouth of a small ravine, wherein were seated on either side of a flat rock Boyle and the colonel.

They were just about playing a game of cards, and a cocked revolver lay at the right hand of either man.

Bill nearly stumbled upon them ere he could check himself, but fortunately they were too much engrossed in their game to hear his approach, and he was enabled to get a good view without danger of being seen himself.

"This game decides it!" Boyle declared, grimly, as he dealt the paste-boards. "The girl cannot belong to us both, you know, colonel. So, if she is to belong to me, I mean to make some money out of her."

"If you do, I will have to hear of it!" Norton replied, savagely. "We are playing for her, now. Even if you win, you'll have to walk over my carcass to get her!"

"That may not be a hard job to do!" was the significant answer. "Two can play at most any modern game, you know. Lead off!"

With a grunt of disgust, the colonel did so, and the game was played rapidly.

Then, suddenly, the colonel slapped down his cards and seized his pistol.

He was too slow-motioned, however.

There was a lightning movement on the other player's part—a flash and a pistol report, and the colonel sunk backward with a groan.

Boyle was upon him like a flash, and with cords, was not long in making him securely a prisoner.

The proprietor of the Ark was insensible; so Boyle proceeded to go through his victim's pockets, and appropriated everything of value.

Then, with a triumphant laugh, he arose to his feet.

"Ha! ha! The colonel sleeps well. Let him sleep. Now for the girl, and a grand long skip from these parts, to parts unknown!"

He glanced sharply about him, as if suspicious. But no sign of an enemy could be detected.

Satisfied on this point, he turned, and plunged into the deeper recesses of the mountain fissure, or ravine, only to be again shadowed by Gold-Button.

"I'll find the Fairy Face, now!" he muttered, jubilantly. "No power can prevent me. But, the question is, what am I going to do with her after I get her?"

It was a question not easily answered.

"I must work Christine for the money!" he mused. "In order to do this, I shall have to show her a lock of the Injun girl's hair and a grave!"

The chase did not last long.

In ten minutes they reached a rough habitation, built against one side of the ravine.

Boyle unlocked the door of this structure and entered, but soon came out again, leading a beautiful maiden, whose wrists were bound.

There was nothing in her form or features that betokened her to be a child of Me-notoga.

Her face was fair, clearly cut and pretty, with liquid brown eyes, pretty teeth, and a pretty mouth; her figure, though petite, was beautifully molded.

She was richly attired in Indian costume, and was, indeed, a most attractive looking person.

If she was of Indian descent, she certainly did not look it.

Gold-Button Bill could scarcely suppress an exclamation of astonishment at sight of her.

"Egad, but she's a daisy!" he mused. "And that's the damsel I contracted to kill, eh? Well, I hope I never see the moon again, if I barm a hair of her innocent head!"

Fairy Face was led from the prison, unwillingly.

"Leave go my arm, monster!" she cried. "I do not want to go with you. I would sooner remain here a prisoner."

Boyle chuckled, villainously.

"I can't help that, my beauty. You have got to go right along with me. I am your natural guardian, until I surrender you to your old red-skin father, if he is your father, which I sincerely doubt."

"You do not mean to restore me to Me-no-toga!" the girl declared. "You are a wicked man, and I do not wish to go with you."

"It doesn't make a particle of difference. You must go, and that's all there is of it. If you try to be mustangy, you will only subject yourself to harsh treatment."

"Where do you propose to take me?"

"To a safer hiding-place for the present. Then, as soon as I can strike up a bargain with Me-no-toga, I'll send you to him."

"Me-no-toga will not bargain for me. He will hunt for me, but pay no money."

"Then he won't get you, and you'll become Mrs. Alf Boyle—that's all!" he said, coolly. "Come along, now. No monkeying, or I'll slap yer cheeks up to a peak!"

And he started briskly off, forcibly jerking her along with him.

This made the blood of Gold-Button Bill literally boil in his veins.

"Blame the fellow, I'll stop his mill!" he muttered, laying hold of a revolver; but, changing his mind, he waited in a crouching position, until Boyle and the captive drew near; then he leaped from cover, and dealt the villain a terrible blow in the face with his clinched fist.

Boyle released his grasp on Fairy Face and dropped like a log.

The amazed girl started to run, but the Professional intercepted her.

"Don't run, miss!" he said, pleasantly, "for there is no occasion for it! I am a friend."

"How do I know that?" Fairy Face demanded. "Every pale-face has turned against the people of Me-no-toga, and I know not whom to trust."

"Well, you can bet solid I'm your friend, and as long as I kin shoot no harm shall come to you. I am Gold-Button Bill, and I allus pan out square, except when any one tries to cheat. Then I'm p'izen!"

"Where is my father?"

"I can't tell you much about that, because I'm somewhat a stranger, hereabouts. He's in the neighborhood of Fairy Flats, however, and has another chap associated with him, called Deadwood Dick. As soon as we can find this Dick, I will find where the old chief is and restore you to him!"

"Fairy Face will be very grateful to the pale-face if he will do this!"

"Waal, you can bet I will! We can't go back to Faro Flats, however, for fear the whites there will recapture you. Does the Fairy Face know of a secret hiding-place, until I can find Deadwood Dick or her father?"

"Nol!"

"Nor is there need that she should!" a voice cried, and Deadwood Dick himself stepped from among the trees. "I guess I can direct her to one!"

Gold-Button Bill wheeled around with a pistol in his grasp, but he restored it to his belt when he saw who it was.

"Ah! you are Deadwood Dick!" he said.

"I am," was the reply, "and I recognize you as my opponent at cards."

"The same."

The two sharps stood eying each other in silence, as if trying to determine whether they were destined to be friends or enemies.

They were plainly two steeled thoroughbreds of the mines, and recognized the fact without any bluster.

"Well, since you did the young lady the favor to rescue her from yonder ruffian, I suppose we may as well shake!" Dick said, by way of breaking the silence.

"As you like!" Bill replied, putting forth his hand. "I have nothing in particular against you except that you won my boddle!"

"I did it fairly, did I no'?"

"You did, I reckon. How about the girl, now? Do you claim the right of being her protector until she is turned over to the chief?"

"As his friend, I would perhaps be entitled

to that right. However, it does not matter in particular, and, if you are satisfied, we will allow the young lady to choose between us."

"Fair enough!" Bill agreed. "At all hazards we will not quarrel over the matter. Fairy Face shall choose!"

The girl looked from one to the other, evidently perplexed and confused.

To her it was a most delicate task.

She proved equal to the emergency however.

"I presume it would be more ladylike in me to accept the protection of my rescuer!" she said, coloring. "I trust, however, that both of you will act as my friends until I find the White Owl."

"You can rest assured on that point, Dick said, heartily. "It is getting late and to attempt to conduct you to Me-no-toga's cave tonight, would hardly be advisable until I can see him personally. Therefore, we will go back to Faro Flats, for the present."

"Why there?" Gold-Button Bill demanded. "Is there not danger that an effort will be made to recapture her?"

Dick shook his head.

"No. She will be safer there, in a certain place I know of, than outside, for Norton will raise the dickens again and have every inch of the surrounding country thoroughly searched. I have a stronghold in Faro Flats that will afford protection for all of us in case of necessity."

"Very well. We will leave it to you then. Let us set out at once."

They did so, Bill explaining on the way the scene he had witnessed. In due time they arrived at the edge of the valley.

Here they paused where the colonel had been shot and left bound.

He was now gone.

Dick looked grim.

"He's gone back to camp, and will doubtless arouse it into a big excitement. Now is our time. Follow quickly!"

So saying, he started off rapidly toward the settlement. Not without some misgivings Bill and Fairy Face followed. The girl seemed to have formed a good opinion of the Professional.

As they neared the camp they saw that there was a bonfire up near the Ark, where a hubbub of voices was heard.

"We can reach the bank in safety!" Dick said, slackening his pace. "Once within it, we will be all right for the present I fancy."

And within five minutes the massive doors of the bank were between them and the people of Faro Flats.

CHAPTER XII.

A REVELATION.

At about the same hour that saw the trio within the bank, Judson Cameron sat in his cosey parlor alone and with the lights turned low.

He occupied an easy-chair, and wore a fancy dressing gown and pair of slippers, and seemed to be taking things very comfortably.

The night was warm, and the low windows of the room opening on the street, were open, admitting the soft, flower-perfumed breeze.

What were the ex banker's thoughts would be hard to guess, but they were probably of a pleasant nature, for he seemed to derive great solace from the cigar he smoked.

He was not destined to remain long undisturbed, however, for a dusky figure appeared at one of the window casements, took a survey of the interior, and then made an agile, but noiseless leap, and was within the room.

It was the same frightful-looking witch who had played eavesdropper to the love-making episode between Me-no-toga and Valley Violet, and afterward followed the latter.

She had glided before the ex-banker before he knew of her presence.

A startled exclamation escaped him as he saw the hideous hag.

"Ha! who are you?" he demanded, in astonishment. "What do you mean by this intrusion?"

She chuckled shrilly.

"Who am I, and what do I mean by this intrusion?" she echoed, as she helped herself to a chair near him. "Why, can it be possible that you do not remember me?"

"To my knowledge, I never laid eyes on you before."

"Yes, you did! yes, you did! You knew me years ago, before I grew old and ugly. When I

was a blushing and unsophisticated half breed maiden you often kissed my hand, and told me you loved me. I am—”

“Chicquita!”

“Yes!”

Mr. Cameron passed his hand over his eyes, as if to rub out the blurs of some passing vision of years gone by, then gazed at the woman keenly.

“Yes! yes! I believe you are right. You are Chicquita—once young and beautiful. That was years ago, however. I was then in the military service. Why have you come here, Chicquita?”

“To see you!” was the answer. “I by accident learned that you had lost your wife. I came here to right a wrong!”

“To right a wrong, eh?”

“Yes.”

“Why, what wrong did you ever do me?”

“You shall learn. When Chicquita was young and pretty, the pet of the military posts, and admired by every one, who was her lover?”

The ex-banker winced.

“Go on!” he said, without answering the interrogation.

“I will go on. You sought Chicquita’s hand, and would have wedded her, but for a fairer-faced woman, who stepped between us, and won your love. You then forsook Chicquita altogether, and left her with a broken heart. The wound soon healed, however, and she wedded a war-chief. But she swore to have revenge on you.”

“Well?”

“Well, about nineteen years ago, your wife presented you with your first child?”

“Yes.”

“I know it. At that time my husband was away on the war-path, and I gave birth to a child. It died, and I set forth to join my husband. On my way I learned of your babe. I saw a chance to get revenge. I stole a few-days old infant from a settlement, and in the dead of one night stole your babe, and left the other in its place!”

“You lie, woman!” Mr. Cameron cried, in a passion. “There is not a word of truth in what you say!”

“There is. I will take my dying oath on it!” Chicquita declared, earnestly. “I could have no object in trying to deceive you. The babes were so young at the time that the difference in them, if there was any, was never discovered.”

“And you did this, woman? Why, I’ll—”

“Do nothing! I am not afraid of you. I have braved too many terrors in my life to be afraid of you. Raise a hand against me and I’ll dash vitriol in your face!”

Cameron shrank back.

In truth, he was afraid of her.

“Go on,” he gasped. “Tell me of my own child!”

“Of course. I took her home, and when my husband returned from the war-path, I led him to believe that the child was my own, by bribing the medicine-man!”

“You did.”

Not Judson Cameron was it, who uttered the words, but a third party, who had gained entrance to the room, and stood, grim and erect, with arms folded across his broad chest.

Chicquita uttered a scream at sight of him, and drew a long knife; but, seeing he made no hostile move, she grew less alarmed.

Mr. Cameron’s astonishment knew no bounds.

“Go on!” the new-comer commanded, in a stern, boarish voice. “Let Chicquita tell the pale face all. Me-no-toga will listen!”

It was the White Owl, who stood there, erect and stoical.

“Chicquita will finish!” the bag said, her eyes glittering. “The child was raised as the offspring of Me-no-toga and Chicquita. No one except me knew the difference. When the child was but five years old, Chicquita, for a trivial offense, was sold by Me-no-toga to the chief of a Southern tribe of Indians, where, until a year ago, she was held a prisoner. She then escaped and began the search for you, Judson Cameron, in order that you might know the deception that had been practiced on you, and who your real child was!”

When she ceased speaking there was a brief silence.

Me-no-toga stood grim and stolid.

Mr. Cameron was pale, dizzy and very much agitated.

“This seems very strange and unnatural to me,” he finally said. “My eldest child is called Christine. She would be the one you claim to have left for my own child. If not my daughter, who is she?”

“I do not know. I searched until I found a

suitable babe, and stole it, without learning its name.”

“What is the name of my own child?”

“It is called the Fairy Face. Yonder is Me-no-toga, who has been known as its father!”

Mr. Cameron turned to the chief.

“Well, sir, what have you to say to this woman’s remarkable statement?” he asked.

Me-no-toga was silent several minutes, during which he appeared to be undergoing a struggle, for his features worked and changed into strange expressions.

“Chicquita mebbe speak truth!” he said. “Me-no-toga never know different but what Fairy Face his own child, ‘till month ago, when old medicine chief killed. Chief den tell him Fairy Face not White Owl’s child—that Chicquita lose babe, at birth!”

It evidently cost the old warrior a struggle to make this confession, for he averted his face, when done.

Mr. Cameron spoke again.

“Has Me-no-toga yet recovered possession of Fairy Face?”

“Ugh! no!”

“Will he be content to return her to her real father, if he finds her?”

“Mebbe. No want Fairy Face, if she not his. Me-no-toga wants Chicquita!”

There was an underlying meaning to his tone, that did not escape Chicquita, and she shuddered.

“What does Me-no-toga want of Chicquita?” she demanded. “He sold her years ago, when she was fair. Now she is old and ugly. Is the White Owl a squaw, that he would try to kill her?”

“Wagh! Chicquita must return to the South. If in Faro Flats, at sunrise, Me-no-toga will kill her!”

“Ha! ha! Me-no-toga fears the wife he sold! He would wed the Valley Violet. Chicquita cares not. He can have the Valley Violet. She is a snake, and will bite the White Owl, and Chicquita will not interfere. Ere sunrise, she will be far to the South.”

“It is well!” Me-no-toga said, and turning, he stepped from the window, and was gone.

Chicquita also arose.

“Chicquita will go, now,” she said. “She has, so far as lies in her power, repaired the wrong of years ago. She has one warning, however, for Judson Cameron. Let him beware of the woman he has raised as his daughter. She is a snake in the grass!” and, without another word, she stepped to the window, and vanished from the ex-banker’s view.

And while Mr. Cameron sat in his dimly lighted parlor, his mind in a whirl of bewilderment, there crouched by the door, in the hall, outside, a woman, young and beautiful, but now with a face of deathly whiteness—a woman with fiercely gleaming eyes, clinched hands, and the expression of an infuriated tigress on her face.

“I have heard the worst!” she breathed, in a sibilant whisper. “I never dreamed of such a thing; and yet I have had a foreboding that something terrible was about to happen. It must have been that which warned me to get rid of the girl they call Fairy Face. Ah! how I hate her, now! How I could tear her heart out, if I had her in my power. But, wait! There is yet triumph in store for me, and I have only to bide my time!”

Needless to add that this woman was Christine—the nameless.

CHAPTER XIII.

TROUBLE BREWING.

As Deadwood Dick had predicted, on Colonel Norton’s arrival back at Faro Flats a “reg’lar time” was inaugurated.

The colonel’s wound had been of but a trifling character, and he had been able to burst his bonds and get back to the camp, where he circulated a story that he had been shot and robbed by a party of roughs whom he had discovered having in their possession the Indian girl, Fairy Face. Among the party, stated he, were Deadwood Dick and Alf Boyle.

A party of men, armed to the teeth, and numbering over a hundred, were immediately organized, and after accepting an invitation to “liquor up,” at Norton’s expense, started out, in squads, to once more scour the surrounding country.

They all returned, hours later, haggard and hungry, but brought no tidings.

Indeed the colonel, of course, had little idea that they would, believing that Boyle had made good his escape with the Fairy Face.

The people of Faro Flats were not permitted to sleep that night, however—that is, the bibu-

lous portion, at least; for the colonel was in a savage state of mind, and held open bar, and free bar, at the Ark, for all who would regale themselves.

That he did not do this without an object may of course be surmised; but those who drank his “pizen” had but one thought, and that was, that “the cunnel was a bully gods feller.”

So that the camp was in a state of literal pandemonium all night, and the street noisy with drunken miners and roughs.

Not long after getting Gold-Button Bill and Fairy Face safely within the bank, Deadwood Dick signified his intention of going out and learning if anything betokened danger of their discovery.

“You had better let me go in your stead!” the Professional said. “If I am seen it matters not, because the people of Faro Flats, in general, have nothing against me, while, if you were discovered, it might go hard with you.”

“Oh! I’ll take my chances, as I always do!” Dick declared. “If I run afoul a cactus it won’t be for the first time. You remain here with the chief’s daughter, and I’ll be back between now and morning.”

Entering the retiring-room he made up as Moses Levi and then left the bank, and directly mingled with the rabble on the street.

He was conscious of the fact that he immediately attracted attention, but took no apparent notice of the matter.

Almost the first person he met whom he knew was his cashier, Hal Hartley.

“Hello!” the younger man cried in an undertone. “Are you not running a good deal of risk?”

“No, not that I am aware of. Why?”

“B-cause. I’d keep pretty shady for a time, if I were you. The colonel is up to some racket, and I suspect that it concerns you somehow. He is raring about like a lassoed bull, and throwin’ the whisky into the boys at a lively rate. He ain’t doing it for nothing, either!”

“Do you think that he has an idea that my Levi business is a sham?”

“Shouldn’t be surprised a bit, if he did.”

“Well, let him. You lay around the bank. If there’s a rupture, go inside, and stay there, with Gold-Button Bill and Fairy Face.”

Hartley stared.

“Have you got her?”

“Yes. Tell them to leave the bank under no conditions, until they see me again!”

Wondering not a little, Hartley bowed, and walked on, musing.

“There’s goin’ to be trouble in this camp, yet!”

And his prophecy was truth.

Before daybreak, nearly every man in Faro Flats, was in possession of one of the notices of Me-no-toga, to call at the bank, and purchase their claims, or leave town, under penalty of death.

Just how they came into possession of the slips of paper, not a man could clearly explain, but have them they did, and were none the wiser who had given them out.

If the camp was excited before, what could be said now, when the import of the notices became current?

Blasphemy filled the air, and fierce and fearful were the threats made against the old Crow chief and his right-hand man, Richard of Deadwood.

The effect produced by the notices was, however, varied. Some of the miners, perhaps a majority, were in favor of coming to time, and securing their claims beyond the possibility of further dispute, by paying down the cash. Others, however, and those the ones who held the lion’s share of value, in the camp, were loud in their expressions of refusal, and formed themselves into a band, under Colonel Norton, for the purpose of resistance to the last.

Fired with whisky, the colonel flitted about and harangued the crowd, and managed to keep the ball of excitement in thorough motion.

There was one thing plain, however, as the night passed away—a disposition on the part of a majority of the citizens, to come to Me-no-toga’s terms, when the bank should next open, for business, and thereby secure their right of citizenship, as well as the right to work their claims, in peace.

The sums named in the notices, were but nominal, as compared with the value of the claims, and the prevailing opinion among the majority was that it would be more discreet and profitable, to prevent a bloody crisis, so far as was in their power.

Colonel Norton keenly realized that there was undeniably two factions in existence, and that he was the weaker of the two, in point of both count and character.

To be beaten was the least of his intention. He had been a victorious commander in the Rebellion, and to be worsted in a civil strife like this would, he argued, be a disgrace too great to bear.

As daybreak approached, the two factions seemed to gradually separate and become distinct from each other. It was then that Norton was better able to discover how many men were for resistance. Those who contemplated paying up were much the stronger in numbers.

With as much dispatch as possible, the colonel assembled his faction within the Ark, and addressed them.

"Feller-citizens!" he cried, "you see that we are now approachin' a crisis, and it behooves us to act without delay. If we don't we will be beaten. Et aire plain that the notices circulated by Me-no-toga are having their effect. The galoots are goin' ter pay fer claims, by a large majority, while we who refuse are in the minority!"

The men uttered murmurs. They could see, as plainly as the colonel, that they were the weaker party.

"Now, then," Norton went on, "somethin' has got to be did, one way or the other. Ef the majority pays their money, they're goin' ter calculate their right to rule Faro Flats. D'y'e see?"

There was another audible expression of disgust, and dark scowls of dissatisfaction.

"I'm jest mentionin' this for our mutual good, you know!" declared the colonel, seeing that he had at least struck a sympathetic chord. "If the majority gets inter power, we of the minority will have no more show for our white alley than a feather in a cyclone. Taey'll welcome old Me-no-toga back, and about the only thing left for us to do will be to git up and vamoose. How d'y'e like the prospectus? Does it strike you favorably?"

"Nary time!" one miner cried savagely, and the others echoed his words.

"I am glad of it!" Norton vociferated. "We won't give up, ef they were ten times our number!"

"Hurrah! No!"

"Then, listen. These other citizens must not git into power. We must nip the game in the bud, fer the old sayin' is true that 'an ounce o' prevention is worth a pound of cure.' By which I mean that nary a galoot must be allowed to pay in one cent fer a claim. D'y'e savvy?"

The men signified that they did.

And within an hour afterward, huge notices of the following order were tacked up in various parts of the camp:

SPECIAL NOTICE!

"It being learned that a delegation of citizens of Faro Flats, terrified by the threats of a single Indian, propose to illegally and unlawfully purchase claims in said town of Faro Flats, from a source that has no power or authority to sell them—

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, representative citizens of said camp, in protection of our rights, do hereby giye warning to said delegation, not to pay in a cent of money to the bank of Faro Flats, as payment for such claims, under penalty of exciting a riot; for whosoever shall attempt to disobey this order will incur the enmity of representative citizens, and will be dealt with in no merciful manner. Death to whoever attempts to pay in a dollar to the said bank for the purpose named!

"Signed,

"COLONEL NOAH NORTON."

? In addition to the colonel's name were the signatures of a large number of others who belonged to his faction.

So, those who intended to purchase claims knew what they had to expect if they acted contrary to the warning.

The result was that they drew aloof from the "representative" citizens still further, and held a long consultation—the result of which was that another placard was flung out to the public gaze, containing the following notice:

WAR!

"We, the undersigned, do defy the so-called 'representative' citizens to prevent us from acting according to our own free will. Any attempt to interfere with our business transactions will meet with prompt repulse.

"We reserve the right to purchase claims, to sell, lease, or do with our money as we please, and will fight it out on that line, if necessary.

"By order of

"COMMITTEE."

And as the members of this faction were observed making hostile preparations, or, more correctly, preparing themselves to resist hostile demonstrations, it looked very much as if there was, indeed, to be war in the Osceola valley.

Seeing which, Colonel Norton ordered his men

to get ready for a determined and deadly struggle for the possession of the camp and control of the valley.

When morning dawned, cloudy and sullen, as if ready to weep for the impending trouble, the Norton party held possession of one end of the camp, and the other faction the other end, wherein the bank was located.

Both parties were well armed, and resolutely nerved for the dark work ahead.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW COMMANDER.

As the morning advanced, the pulse of the camp of Faro Flats throbbed as it had never done, before.

Norton's men were in a state of great activity as if getting ready to make a move, when the hour for opening the bank should arrive.

As yet, the other party had decided upon no positive plan of action, on account of having not yet chosen a commander.

The activity on the part of the enemy called them to a sense of their duty, and the question passed around—

"Who shall take command?"

"We must have a leader, or our mud is dough!" a miner averred. "Where's Jud Cameron?"

Mr. Cameron was sent for.

He consented to act with the "pay-ups" but refused to take command.

"You must understand one thing, boys!" he said. "If you go into this thing, in as dead earnest as you appear to be going, you must know that, while favoring yourselves, you are also fighting for the rights of others—of Me-no-toga, the White Owl, and his associate Deadwood Dick."

"I reckon we know that!" a prominent mine boss responded. "We ain't goin' ter give up a good thing ter save a little money, ner we ain't goin' ter allow Noah Norton ter run the town to suit bissell. Ain't them the general sentiments boys?"

The chorus of assents were unanimous.

"Knew it!" the man, Farr, exclaimed. "Ye see, Mister Cameron, 'tain't no use o' squeezin' around the fac—it war a dirty mean shake ye fellers give the White Owl, even ef' he was a red pelt, an' considerin' it all, he orter have some sort o' show fer his white alley. Tharfore seein' as he ain't taxed us werry steep, we're solid, to a man, fer whackin' up, an' gittin', a clean right to our claims!"

"I am not dissenting, in the least, sir. In fact, I favor the cause. But, let me tell you, I haven't a doubt but what you will have to fight for all you get. Norton is a venomous old fellow, and will not give up, tamely. You are in need of a commander, and a good one, at that. No half-way man will do you. There is but one man I know of who would suit you, and he is Moses Levi!"

"What, a Jew! Why, he'd run at the first sing of a bullet!"

"Take my word for it he will do nothing of the sort!"

"Where is he? Trot him out here, and if he will fill the bill, all right."

Mr. Cameron departed, but soon returned ed with the pseudo Jew.

"Mr. Levi, there is going to be trouble in this camp, over the Indian claim business," Cameron explained. "Norton and his party propose to stand out and fight against paying. These men propose to settle. They want a commander, who is not afraid to take them through and win. One party or the other, plainly, must control Faro Flats. It depends almost wholly on the respective leaders as to who wins. What have you to say?"

"I will leave it to the gentlemen, themselves, whether they consider me competent to take charge of them!" was the reply, and so saying, Dick removed his hirsute disguise, exposing his face to view.

There was an involuntary ejaculation of astonishment, on the part of each man except Mr. Cameron.

"Deadwood Dick!"

"Yes, Deadwood Dick!" was the reply. "I am at your command, gentlemen. If you prefer me for leader, I am at your service. I suppose, also, you have it in your power to make me your prisoner, if you think there might be more gain in possessing my enmity than my friendship!"

"I reckon we'd jes' as lief have yer friend ship!" Farr announced, "ef' you've no objections. I've been in places, afore now, where you were purty frisky, an' I allus thort it were the best policy not to rub yer hair the wrong way. I speak fer ther boys, an' I say hurrah

fer our new commander, Deadwood Dick! Hip! hip!"

"Hurrah!" finished the crowd, with an emphasis that there could be no possibility of misunderstanding.

"Thank you, gents!" Dick said, bowing, and looking the pleasure he felt. "Although this is something quite unexpected, I assure you, I appreciate the honor you have conferred upon me, and you can bet your bottom dollar that Faro Flats is ours!"

The words, and the hearty manner in which they were uttered, elicited a yell of applause, which caused a crowd of the enemy in the other end of town to congregate in the street and stare.

Deadwood Dick was, from that time, a prime favorite, and the men regarded him as a man-wonder.

Quick to discern, and as prompt to order, he at once set the men about preparing for the attack that was likely to take place, and in less than an hour, he had everything arranged to his satisfaction, and the men so instructed that they were fully as sanguine of victory as Dick, himself.

They were set to drilling, by Mr. Cameron, who had a fair knowledge of military tactics, and the appearance they made, on the street, was imposing, to say the least.

This was what Deadwood Dick wanted.

The effect on the enemy was perceptible.

They ceased their preparations to some extent, and watched the movements of the party up the street.

Among the effects of one of the miners, Dick secured a good-sized flag, which had seen service in the Rebellion. A suitable pole was secured, and the flag fastened to it. Then, with pole, flag and a spade, in hand, the daring commander bade the men follow him, and marched down the street.

Midway between the bank and the Ark a halt was made, a hole dug, and the staff securely planted, while the stars and stripes floated proudly out on the breeze.

A volley of rifle-shots were fired from the vicinity of the Ark, but fell far short of the mark, and were greeted with a hoot of derision, when it was seen that no effort was made by Norton's party to advance.

"They're afraid," Dick said, with a laugh. "We will go back now and open the bank, and you can secure your claims. If there is a fight, I will afterward sell you the Norton parties' claims at auction, and hand the proceeds over to Me-no-toga. No attempt will be made on our part, however, to confiscate their claims, until they set the ball a-rolling."

A retreat was then made, and at promptly ten o'clock the doors of the bank swung open, and the place was ready for business, with Hal Hartley behind the counter.

Although Gold-Button Bill had left the bank and mingled with the crowd, Fairy Face was still concealed in the private office, a secret known only to Dick, Bill and Hartley.

A reserve of men was kept in the street to guard against a surprise.

For several hours Hartley and Dick were busied in transferring claims and receiving money, but at last the business was completed and the bank was closed for the day, while many a miner rejoiced that at a small expenditure of money he was the lawful owner of his claim, and privileged to work it "cl'ar thru to China" if he so chose.

And as yet no attack had been made, although there was an active bustle constantly going on in the down-street camp.

"I'd like to believe they've given up the notion of an attack," Dick took an opportunity to say to Bill in an undertone; "but I don't half believe it. Things appear fair to middling, but, mind you, it ain't always safe to judge by appearances."

And not half an hour after he uttered these words a great commotion appeared to be taking place in Norton's camp.

Dick looked annoyed.

"Something's the rip!" he muttered. "I wonder what it is?"

The explanation came sooner than expected.

CHAPTER XV.

CHRISTINE'S SCHEME.

THE cause of the commotion was apparent, when a horse dashed out from Norton's camp, bearing a rider, direct toward the flag Deadwood Dick had planted.

The rider was a young woman, attired in top-boots, breeches, a hunting-shirt belted at the waist, and a slouch prairie hat, the wide brim of which blew up to the breeze.

She rode with the reckless abandon of a gaucho, and carried in one hand a glittering hatchet.

Did Deadwood Dick recognize her?

Else why did a sudden expression of grimness and pallor shoot athwart his features.

Gold-Button Bill was standing by his side.

His hawk-like eyes stared at the woman.

"Egad!" he ejaculated. "It is she!"

Deadwood Dick turned on him fiercely.

"Do you know her?" he demanded.

Gold-Button laughed good-naturedly.

"Well, yes, slightly. She invited me to her tent last night, said she was your wife once, and that you had sworn to kill me! I saw that she was a little off, up-stairs, and so left her to her imaginations."

Dick compressed his lips and turned away, as it to hide the expression of his face.

The reckless rider came swiftly on toward the flag-staff, whirling the hatchet above her head, and uttering a peculiar, piercing cry—a cry as of a human in distress.

"She's gwine ter drap the flag!" yelled Joe Farr, excitedly seizing his rifle. "Dang me ef I don't drap her!"

"Stop!" Deadwood Dick said, hoarsely.

That was all.

Then he suddenly leaped away toward the woman who rode forward so wildly.

Not a score of yards had he run, when she suddenly jerked her horse back, wheeled and dashed back toward the Norton camp.

Dick also returned, then, to his comrades.

He was dark, moody, uncommunicative.

"Who was she?" Judson Cameron ventured to ask.

"A flend, in hatred—an angel, in love!" was the tart reply, as the ex-prince of the road turned away.

The return of the female rider to the Norton camp (who was, as the former readers of the "Deadwood Dick" romances may have guessed, none other than Calamity Jane), created another stir, and the rebels, as Farr termed them, were seen bodily assembled, in consultation.

That no immediate attack would be made, seemed probable, when they were seen to dissolve and saunter about in different directions.

The day dragged by, but Deadwood Dick warned his men to be constantly on the alert, as there was no telling when a sudden emergency might arise.

During the afternoon, in passing the Cameron residence, Gold-Button Bill was spied by Christine, who followed and overtook him.

"Stop!" she ordered, authoritatively. "I want to see you!"

"Well, I am here—gaze upon me!" he retorted. "Am I not a darling?"

"You have not treated me right. What have you done in regard to the Indian wench?"

"Found her!"

"Have you? have you? Where is she?"

"Where no harm will come to her, I assure you!"

"You have not killed her, then?" fiercely.

"Well, I should presume not. A man don't generally step on a ripe strawberry and crush it, when he pauses to consider that it is sweet enough to eat."

Her face flushed, angrily.

"Then you have become smitten with the wench?"

"If you mean the Indian girl—yes. She is a duck, you bet—a darling little pet of a canary bird!"

"I am glad you like her. It will sting you when you hear of her death!"

"I presume likely. She is not dead yet."

"She will be, soon. But, let this stop. I have something of importance to tell you."

"Let 'er slide! I'm all ears!"

"Very well. It is this. An Indian girl, who styles herself the Valley Violet, has won the heart of the old Indian chief, Me-no-toga. He wants her for his wife, and has agreed to give her all his fortune, in gold, if she will marry him. To-night he shows her where the gold is cached. D'yee see?"

"Wait until I extract this eye-winker, please. There, I see quite plainly. By the way, you have a little too much magnesia at one corner of your alabaster nose. But, go on. This Indian girl is *yourself!*"

Choking back angry words, the nameless schemer continued, plausibly:

"Yes, I have played my cards to win, and win I shall. To-night I gaze at all of Me-no-toga's wealth, and return here. In the morning, circumstances not interfering, I become Mrs. Me-no-toga. See?"

"Confound it, there's another eye-winker! Yes, I see."

"Well, circumstances will interfere, however. After I return to-night, you and I will go to the cache, take Me-no-toga's gold, and adjourn to distant parts, where we will enjoy ourselves, and once more live as husband and wife, with no one to again separate our loving hearts."

"We will?"

"Of course! Won't that be delightful?"

"Perfectly too-too!" Fink assented. "I fancy myself lying on a million-dollar sofa, smoking a two-cent cigar and listening to you playing a Beethoven chorus—on the wash-board. Bliss per en rapturelo!—that's Australian Sioux, if you ain't versed!"

"Enough of this nonsense. I mean business, I'll have you know."

"Do you? But I don't!"

"You won't become a party to the scheme?"

"Not if the court is aware of the proximity of the nearest saloon—no! I have retired from the scheming business, dear Christine, and propose in due time to drive a staple into my hand, and affix my hand, by padlock and key, to that of the felicitous, fresh and flourishing Fairy Face. Is there any further information I can vouchsafe you, my fading bud?"

"I've a mind to kill you!" she hissed, in a violent passion.

"Oh! I wouldn't, if I were you," he advised. "It isn't one of the pleasantest duties of Judge Lynch to be obliged to initiate a woman. If you are really bloodthirsty, why don't you go over and try your hand on the enemy? You might make your mark as a soldier, and eventually wear the epaulettes," and with another of his tantalizing laughs, which he knew so well how to utter, he turned and sauntered back toward the bank.

She glared after him a moment, half-blinded by fury, then went back to the house, a desperate gleam in her eyes.

"The chief's money first—then, perhaps, I might be of some service to the enemy. Curse him! I almost fancy I love him again."

If she did, it was a strange way she had of expressing it.

When Gold-Button Bill got back to the bank it was sunset, and shadows were beginning to creep along the edges of the valley.

"Well, what is the prospect?" he asked, meeting Deadwood Dick.

"I don't know. I hardly look for an attack—should quicker think they were planning some deviltry over there. When it gets dark enough I'll reconnoiter. Another thing I don't like is that I do not hear from Me-no-toga."

"I hear he has got a love affair on hand."

"I am so aware. I have seen him with the Valley Violet."

"Do you know who she is?"

"Yes—know more than that."

"The chief is going to show her his cache of gold to-night."

"All right, so far as that is concerned. The Injun ain't half the fool you take him for. I've no doubt he's stuck on the girl, but he's no fool. He'll show her the gold, or a portion of it, to test her. If she gets away with it she'll have to get up before she goes to bed. If the old red-skin catches her at stealing—well, I wouldn't like to be a member of a company that held a big insurance on her life."

"Nor I. But look! What does that mean?"

"To arms!" Deadwood Dick yelled, sharply, as he looked toward Norton's quarters, whether the Professional had pointed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BATTLE.

WITH unexpected suddenness, Norton had formed his men into a solid column, four abreast, and appeared ready to move down upon the defenders.

Deadwood Dick saw this at a glance, and knew that the crisis was at hand.

His call brought every man of his party to the front, armed and ready for the affray.

After looking them over, and noting that each one seemed eager for the fight, he formed them into three columns, of four abreast, and sent two to either side of the street, while the other occupied the middle of the highway.

Not a moment too soon, either, for the enemy, with regular step, advanced toward the flag.

"Forward, march!" Dick cried. "We'll meet 'em half way!"

And the two bodies moved toward each other.

This was evidently not expected by the Norton party, who showed signs of hesitation.

They came on, however.

Coolly and fearlessly Deadwood Dick strode on in advance of his men, his keen eye measuring every foot of the lessening space between the two parties, and noting every movement of the enemy.

Gold-Button Bill, apparently equally as fearless, strode by his side, ready to take his share of the risk, and fight with the "Pay-Ups," to the bitter end.

Step by step the foes neared; then—

"Forward, double-quick, charge!" yelled Dick, sharply, and a charge was made in dead earnest.

It was met by a scathing volley of bullets, but the men dashed on, firing as they went. The two bodies met, and engaged in a desperate conflict that was sanguinary indeed.

The report of fire-arms, the clash of steel, and the yells of the fighting foes made a terrible din, and the struggle was a deadly one.

Norton's men were too much in the minority to live against such odds, and the order of retreat was given.

"After 'em!" yelled Gold Button Bill, who had lost sight of Dick. "Sweep 'em from the town!"

Pursuit was given, and with disastrous results to the enemy, many of whom were shot down ere they could get to cover.

The victory was in reality won, and as those who had taken to cover, began a random but disastrous fusilade from doors and windows, Bill ordered the men to fall back and look for Deadwood Dick as they went.

This was done, and the dead and wounded taken along, but Deadwood Dick was not among the number.

What could have become of him?

That was a question that puzzled every one.

"He was in the thickest of the *melee*, and all at once, I failed to see him!" Gold-Button explained. "The only way I can account for his disappearance is that he was snatched off his guard, and borne to the rear!"

"That is likely the case!" Mr. Cameron said.

"He is a brave fellow, no matter what is said against him, and must be rescued."

"Bet high on that!" the Professional declared.

"I'll rescue him, or my name ain't Bill Fink!"

Mr. Cameron staggered back, agast.

"What?" he gasped.

"Yes, Bill Fink!" the Professional reiterated, fiercely. "If any hauntings of a dead duelist go stalkin' around your boudoir at night, Judson Cameron, jest chain 'em up and remind 'em that their days o' usefulness are over. But that's neither here nor there. There's other things o' more importance, now!"

"That may be true, but if you are indeed William Fink, the discovery lifts a load of anxiety from my heart!" Mr. Cameron said. "I have found you a brave, noble fellow, and earnestly pray that you may overlook the past."

"So far as you are concerned, kerect. As fer the gal, I'm shut o' her, an' ain't sorry. We'd a' bin like a pair o' wrong boots—miss-mates. I've got another one now, in the prospectus, and expect to settle down, if I don't get settled here!"

The battle had lasted but a few minutes, but in that time seven brave miners had lost their lives, on the defenders' side, and seventeen were disabled, if not more dangerously wounded.

Of the enemy over a dozen had been killed, and twice as many badly wounded. Their dead still lay in the street.

"I reckon they won't be apt to relish the puddin' they struck when they come to take a census, and correspondingly, will decline to enter into the feast again," Bill declared, grimly, after ordering the dead and wounded properly cared for.

"Thet ain't certain," Joe Farr cried, as he nursed a crippled left finger. "It hes jest struck me thet the April shower ain't over, yet!"

"Why?"

"Waal, ye see, ter-night's stage from South is not only likely ter bring 'em in reinforcements, but I heerd, yesterday, that a stampede from Styxville was as good as a sworn to thing. Thet would jest fix 'em up boomin'!"

"But it is not positive all of these men would take sides with Norton."

"Pooh! what yer talkin' about? A duck allers locates near water, ef she can. So does er galoot squat whar bezam is the handiest—an' who has more o' it than the cun'nel? Bar'l's o' it in the Ark, sir, an' I wouldn't mind havin' a nip o' it now, myself!"

There was certainly some logic in the miner's opinion, even if inelegantly expressed, and Bill was aware of it, too.

Should the enemy get reinforcements during the night, the outlook for the defenders would not be so bright.

Still, it would not do to let the men get discouraged; so he said:

"Pshaw! That's a funny notion o' yours, Farr. I'm goin' over there, when I get you all in shape, to rescue Deadwood Dick, and if I don't tote back a demijohnny of bug-juice it will be because Norton don't keep the stuff!"

Just then, Hal Hartley, who had taken part in the affray, approached Bill, and drew him aside, excitedly:

"Bad news!" he whispered.

"What? Speak quick!"

"This. While the fight was in progress, the door of the bank was burst open, and the girl abducted!"

The Professional's teeth went together, with a click!

"Anything else missing?"

"No. The money was in the safe."

"Good! She is gone—you are sure?"

"Yes!"

"Then, not a word! I noticed that neither Colonel Norton, nor the woman in breeches were in the fight. They did the job!"

"Probably."

"I haven't a doubt. Keep quiet. I'll know, ere long!"

The abduction nerved the Professional to even greater action than before. He had taken a strong interest in the Fairy Face, and he meant, if possible, to continue her acquaintance, and eventually sue for her hand.

Giving all the necessary orders, and seeing that the wounded were properly cared for, he left matters in Mr. Cameron's hands, and set out for the enemy's camp, ostensibly to find Deadwood Dick, but in reality to find both Dick, and Fairy Face.

He took a roundabout course, so as to approach the camp from the other side.

The night was dark and gloomy, and there was a chance for skulking, without being easily seen. He safely reached the southern end of the camp, just in time to see a huge bonfire blaze up in the street, near the Ark, where Norton's followers, were congregated.

By the light, he was enabled to get a good view of the situation, and from what he saw, concluded that a repetition of the attack would not be made that night, at least.

The crowd appeared to be in a state of excitement, however, and there was a constant passing in and out of the Ark.

"I wouldn't be afraid to bet that some sort of a circus is goin' to happen!" Bill muttered. "The gang look as how they were waiting for some kind of a picnic. Hope they're not goin' to—Hello!"

The ejaculation was caused by seeing two persons come from the hotel.

One was Colonel Norton.

The other was Christine!

There could be no mistaking that.

The Professional congratulated himself that he knew her too well to be in error now.

"But, what the dickens is she up to now? I'd be doin' right to shoot her," he mused.

The two paused on the steps of the Ark, and consulted; then Norton called a ruffianly-looking fellow to them.

Soon after, Christine left the camp, accompanied by the rough.

"She's goin' for the gold!" Bill muttered, "and calculates to make the matter easy, by havin' the tough capture the White Owl, an' bring him here to be shot. I'll bet the plan won't work!"

Shortly after Christine's departure, a man, bound and helpless, was led from the Ark, with one end of a noosed rope around his neck.

It was Deadwood Dick, and they were going to lynch him.

CHAPTER XVII.

BLOOD-GOLD.

SURROUNDED by the gloom that pervaded the valley, Me-no-toga, the White Owl, awaited the coming of her whom he had known as the Valley Violet.

He was attired as on the night before, and looked if anything younger, and more presentable.

He had been at the rock since dusk, standing silent and motionless, awaiting the coming of the one who was fairer to his eyes than Chicquita.

He had heard the firing down the valley, and knew that there was trouble at the pale-face camp, but it had no effect in breaking his vigil.

It was long after the battle-sounds had ceased ere, panther-like and swiftly the Valley Violet glided up to the tryst-rock.

"Is the great chief tired of waiting?" she asked, pleasantly.

"Me-no-toga patient," was the reply. "Valley Violet come to see Me-no-toga's gold cache?"

"Yes."

"Did Valley Violet come alone?"

"Yes. Why does the chief ask?"

"Nothin'. Let the Violet come with chief!"

He stepped from the rock, seized her by the arm, and led the way up the valley.

A mile at least they went; then paused before a huge wall of rock, the face of which had been hewn smooth by Nature's artistic hand, but was partly draped with a sheet of thick, clinging moss, of the greenest hue.

Pulling aside a portion of this moss, Me-no-toga struck a match.

A large, cavernous aperture was revealed, wherein was stored numerous leathern pouches, and also were heaps of nuggets of gold, from the size of a pea upward.

It was a sight worth gazing at.

"That not all," Me-no-toga said. "More in nudder place, b'long to Fairy Face. Dis for Valley Violet!"

The scheming woman gazed in speechless admiration at the treasure until the match went out, then she said:

"Very well, Valley Violet is satisfied. In the morning at sunrise she meet Me-no-toga at flat rock, and bring minister to marry us. Let us go."

The chief dropped the moss vail and turned to accompany her.

As he did so, he received a heavy blow beside the head, which dropped him like a log.

"Dunno but I fixed him fer good, miss!" a voice exclaimed, and the ruffian stepped forward whom Gold-Button Bill had seen accompany Christine from the camp.

"It don't matter," Christine said, coldly. "Tote him back to town anyhow, and give him to the colonel. Be spry about it, too. Have you got the burro near?"

"Yes, mum."

"Very well. You can go."

The ruffian accordingly raised the senseless chief, and dragged him away.

Soon after, the receding sound of a horse's footfalls reached Christine's hearing, and she chuckled outright with triumph.

"I've lost a name, but I've won what is far better than all—a fortune!" she said. "Fairy Face can have the rest, if there is any; this is plenty enough for me."

She vanished in the darkness, but soon returned, leading her saddle-pony.

A lantern was then lit, and the work of transferring the fortune to the pony's back began. It was no easy job, and some little time was occupied in doing it.

"Now, for the present, I will go back to Faro Flats," she said. "Only one person knows that I have been masquerading, and he will be lucky if he lives till morning. I can store the fortune in my own room until I see chances to convert it into paper money by degrees. Even if Me-no-toga should happen to get free he will never suspect me of being the Valley Violet!"

Deluded person to believe this!

She went back home, little dreaming that she had committed an offense that was destined to cost her her life.

She had not yet begun to unload her ill-gotten treasure, on reaching the Cameron residence, when she heard a rustle in the grass, and turning, with a nervous start, saw a tall figure looming up before her.

It was Me-no-toga!

"Ugh!" he grunted. "The Valley Violet snake. Chicquita say so. Me-no-toga no believe it; believe it now, though. What snake got on hoss?"

Christine was paralyzed with terror.

She trembled in every limb; her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, and refused to speak.

"Wagh! Snake no answer!" the chief hissed, stepping nearer. "Snake steal Ijun's gold. Tink him fool, mebbe. Show, quick!" A glittering blade flashed through the air, repeatedly, and each time there was a sickening thud.

Without a scream, poor erring Christine threw up her arms, and fell forward to the ground, her life-blood ebbing out, and forming pools around where she lay.

Seizing the pony by the bridle, then Me-no-toga strode rapidly away.

His dream of love was over and, he had had his revenge, Indian like!

CHAPTER XVIII.

CO CLUSION.

THE moment Gold Button Bill saw that Deadwood Dick was a prisoner, his mind was fully made up to rescue him, if possible, no matter what the danger might be.

He had formed a sort of attachment for the ex-prince of the road, such as he did not usually make, on so short acquaintance, and, whatever his faults, was not the man to go back on a parole.

One thing he noticed, to his delight:—Dick was apparently unwounded, and was in as good fighting trim, as ever, should he get his freedom.

There was a shout of applause, as two of the colonel's men led the prisoner forth.

"Thar he is! Death to Deadwood Dick," was the shout that went up.

The cry did not cause a change of expression upon the prisoner's face, which, though a trifle pale, was perfectly composed.

"He's grit, clean to the back-bone!" Gold-Button Bill muttered, from his place of concealment. "He kinder calculates ther jig is up, but he won't kick, nary time. I wonder how I'm goin' ter proceed?"

It was not an easy question to answer.

To dash in among the crowd, singly, and alone, would savor of madness.

Just in front of the Ark grew a large tree, whose numerous branches reached out both over the hotel roof and over the street.

There were plenty of lower branches adapted to the uses of Judge Lynch, and it was evident that Deadwood Dick would soon be dangling to one of them.

Colonel Norton followed the trio from the veranda to the street, his face indicating his pleasure at the turn affairs had taken.

After one end of the noosed rope had been tossed over a suitable limb, and seized by strong hands as it fell on the other side, the colonel walked up to Deadwood Dick with the unmistakable air of insolence.

"Well, my festive Richard, how do you find yourself about this time o' night?"

"I am not aware that any radical change has occurred in the state of my health since last we met!" was the calm retort.

"No, but there will tho'!" the colonel chuckled. "We're goin' ter send you to the happy land o' Canaan, by a quicker route than Wells & Fargos'. Are you ready to collapse?"

"Always prepared for that, which is more than you can say."

"Yer lucky. Ye see, we all hev respect fer a man o' your bloomin' caliber, but twixt you an' me, yer a little too fulsome to be runnin' around loose. Don't ye think so?"

"Haven't a doubt of it!" Dick responded.

"If I get free, you'll find how fulsome I am!"

"That's just it. We've experienced so much of you o' late, that we realize what a blessed boon it is to have you at our mercy. Are you not afraid to dangle?"

"Pooh, no! I've faced death before."

"Yer a gritty cuss, an' it's a pity ter spile ye. Now, lookee here—this is business. You could take my handful o' men and clean out the other party, slick and clean, couldn't you?"

"Possibly!" Dick retorted.

"I know it!" the colonel declared. "I ain't no fool, an' I know how fur a coon kin jump, by the color o' his tail. We intend hevin' Faro Flats fer ours, by hook or crook, if we hev ter fight fer it, all winter; so we've got a perposal what is fair. You secede from them, an' fight on our side—take charge o' our forces, and you shall go free, an' stan' equal in the dividin' o' claim, arter the town is our'n!"

"Indeed!"

"You bet!"

"And you think I would do that?"

"Yer a fool ef ye don't!"

"Then you can set me down as a first-class fool!" Dick declared, emphatically.

The colonel swore!

"Ye won't secede, then?" he demanded.

"Nary a secede. Go on with your rope performance!"

"Then, ye shall dance a mezzerky in air. Git ready, boys! When I say 'pea-nuts' give him a boost. Some one cut the thongs about his feet, so we kin watch him kick hisself when he finds how implacable a foe is fate in connection wi' a good rope!"

The bonds about Dick's feet were then cut, and every one was on the qui vive of expectancy.

A moment more, and Deadwood Dick would be suspended between earth and eternity.

Just then, a sheet of flame burst from the second story window of a house adjoining the Ark!

"Fire! fire!" yelled a miner, making a rush for the house, and the cry was taken up, and the crowd surged toward the burning building.

The men holding the end of the noosed rope ran also, and thus for an instant, attention was averted from the prisoner—but an instant, yet when the colonel looked around his prey was gone!

A howl of rage broke from his lips, and he glared in every direction, but in vain. Deadwood Dick had vanished as suddenly as if the earth had opened up and swallowed him!

Up among the branches of the leafy tree, two men were creeping out toward the roof of the Ark.

It is needless to add they were Deadwood Dick and his plucky rescuer, who had lost no time in taking advantage of the inattention, and lifted and assisted the prisoner upward, by the rope intended to hang him.

"We won't have no time to spare, in getting out of here!" Gold-Button Bill remarked. "Our chance is, now, when no one is in the hotel."

"Have you your weapons, and some for me?"

"Yes."

They reached the roof, and descended through a trap-door, into the loft of the hotel.

"We must find Fairy Face!" Bill declared, briefly. "She is a prisoner, her, too."

From room to room they glided, but no trace of the girl could be found.

"Let's git!" Dick said. "We can find her, at another time, you see!"

They left the hotel, by the rear, and in the darkness escaped without discovery.

To make their way back to their own camp, occupied but a few moments, and there, Dick received a hearty welcome.

The night passed slowly.

The fire, adjoining the hotel, was extinguished, and the Norton end of the town became comparatively quiet.

Restless and anxious, concerning the abduction of Fairy Face, Gold-Button Bill soon set out, again, to reconnoiter.

In an hour, he returned.

"Some plan of action is necessary, at once!" he announced. "I overheard enough, to know that reinforcements are expected shortly before daybreak!"

"Then, one thing is certain—an attack must be made, at once!" and Dick called the men together, and explained the situation.

At first, there was a visible reluctance, on the part of some to make another charge, but Dick's words of encouragement finally brought them around, to his views.

"Our best plan is to hem them in!" the commander decided. "The hotel is the rendezvous, and a portion of our men must guard it in the rear. Two other divisions will then approach and attack from the other end of the street, and I anticipate that our victory will be easily won!"

The men were reorganized into three divisions, and captained respectively by Mr. Cameron, Gold-Button Bill and Deadwood Dick.

Bill and his men were assigned to the southern end of the camp; Mr. Cameron and his party were to guard the rear of the hotel, while Dick and his division inaugurated the attack from the north.

After bidding each other Godspeed, the two divisions set out, stealthily, for their respective positions. They were to be allotted time enough to reach their stations before Dick began his attack.

Twenty minutes later, mounted upon horses, Dick and his men swept down toward the hotel, with wild yell.

Gold-Button Bill and his party also began an attack from the south, while Cameron's men made their presence known in the rear of the Ark.

The assault was so unexpected that full a dozen of Norton's men were down ere a retreat could be beaten into the Ark.

The attacking forces then, also fell to cover, and watched for their opportunity to pick off a man whenever one made bold to show himself. Thoroughly hedged in were the enemy, now, and Dick and his men were masters of the situation.

The matter now had the appearance of becoming a protracted siege, unless something else should happen.

And that something did happen.

Not half an hour had passed after the attack ere a large column of smoke was discovered issuing from the roof of the Ark.

"The place is afire!" was the cry that went up.
"Now we have'm."

"Let not a shot be fired, until we see if they propose to surrender!" Deadwood Dick cried, and the word was passed down the line.

Dick was soon joined by Gold-Button Bill, who had moved his party nearer to the building.

"D'ye think they'll surrender?" he demanded, eagerly.

"Haven't a doubt of it!" Dick replied. "They've got but two other choices—burn up, or attempt to run the gantlet."

"But, the Fairy Face?"

"I don't know. We shall have to wait developments."

The smoke arose in denser volumes, and presently a huge glare of light illuminated the scene, as the flames burst through the roof.

"That'll wake 'em up!" Dick declared. "They are aware of their peril, now."

This was evident, as it was seen that there was a great stir going on, within the Ark.

Presently, the door was flung open, and Colonel Norton, bearing a white flag in his hand, came out upon the veranda.

Accordingly, Dick advanced, within speaking distance.

"We are forced to surrender, or be burnt up!" Norton cried. "If we surrender, are we to be considered and treated as prisoners of war?"

"If you surrender you will be given the choice of forever leaving this valley, or dancing the mid-air mazourka, as you wanted me to do?" Dick replied.

"We will surrender then, and quit the camp."

"Very well. Come forth, one by one, and lay down your weapons at my feet!"

This was done, and the arms of each man were pinioned to his back.

Dick then faced Norton.

"Where is the Fairy Face?" he demanded.

"Up there!" Norton said grimly, pointing to the second story of the burning building. "Ye better be spry to git her out."

With a howl of rage Gold-Button Bill leaped away into the Ark.

Anxiously was his return awaited, and at last he came, half dead with smoke, but bearing the Fairy Face in his arms, unharmed.

The victory was complete.

What else remains to be told?

The Ark burned to the ground, but in due time was rebuilt, and Joe Farr became its proprietor.

The next morning the defeated faction were given their liberty on promising never to return, and took their departure.

Their claims were divided among the victors.

Me-no-toga the following day restored pretty Coral Cameron to her father, and there was also a gladsome occasion when Fairy Face was informed of her true parentage.

To her Me-no-toga gave half of his fortune, the other half to Deadwood Dick, who in turn divided it between Mr. Cameron and Gold-Button Bill, having, as he said, more than enough to see him comfortably through life.

A partnership was then formed between Mr. Cameron, Hartley and Fink, as a banking firm, and Faro Flats entered on a new career of peace and prosperity.

Poor Christine was found and buried, and a stone at her head bears the name "Christie Cameron."

Me-no-toga, after thus disposing of his cached fortune, took his departure from the valley of the Osceola, a grim and uncommunicative man. He was going in search of Chiequita, he said.

Gold-Button Bill's admiration for Fairy Face grew into love, and they are soon to be married, with Judson Cameron's sanction.

It is not improbable that Hartley will also lead Coral to the altar.

A few days later Deadwood Dick found a white, haggard face and an inanimate form in a mountain gulch south of Faro Flats.

He knelt beside the form; he wept; he prayed—then, after giving the remains interment, he took leave of the lonely grave forever—the grave of her who had attempted to cut down the flag in Faro Flats—Calamity Jane.

In regard to the ruthless mountain rover himself, the subjoined, from a Nevada paper, will offer a fitting conclusion to this romance:

"KILLED.—If any credit can be given to a report that is going the rounds, the noted dare-devil of the Far West, Deadwood Dick, who has had a hand in nearly every sort of a scrape and adventure, good, bad and indifferent, was shot and killed by a posse of Vigilantes at Henrysville the other day. He had been 'tolling' stages again."

THE END.

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